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**Epistemological, Methodological and
Ethical Aspects of Conducting Interviews
About Anomalous Experiences -
Leonardo Breno Martins**

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Investigating the Connection
Between Bodily Experience, Beliefs and
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And More...



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Welcome to Vol. 4 No. 1 (a), the first issue of *Paranthropology* for 2013. This issue is split into two parts. Vol. 4 No. 1 (b) will be released as a paperback book simultaneously (or near simultaneously) alongside this magazine issue, and features articles from Charles F. Emmons & Penelope Emmons, David J. Hufford, Charles D. Laughlin, Tanya M. Luhrmann, Sabina Magliocco, James Morely, Andrew newberg, Jason Throop, Angela Voss and Hilary S. Webb, amongst others, tackling issues around the concept of 'Experience' and how best to approach it. This theme is also echoed in this magazine issue, featuring contributions from Leonardo Breno Martins on interview techniques in the study of anomalous experience, Emma Ford on her ethnographic study of contemporary Christian surfers, Simon J. Sherwood on the aftereffects for a small town following an unusual sequence of experiences involving the legendary Mothman, Simon Alexander Hardison on crisis apparitions during the American civil war, Christopher Laursen on the investigation of first-hand experience through historical documentation, Angela Voss (in an article set to appear in an extended form in the forthcoming *Daimonic Imagination: Uncanny Intelligence* anthology) on the perception of daimonic entities as visible lights, and Callum E. Cooper's examination of the out-of-body experiences of Dr. Alex Tanous. In addition to these experientially themed articles, Henry Dosedla gives us an overview of the links between the toxic plant *Helleborus niger* and Central European folklore, medicine and shamanism, David Luke contributes a colourful obituary for parapsychologist and psychedelic activist Steve Abrams (1938-2012), and Fiona Bowie responds to George P. Hansen's recent recognition of *Paranthropology* and the Afterlife Research Centre (ARC) as innovations in the field of psychical research.

I hope you enjoy the issue.

Jack Hunter

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'Life is Not About Chasing the Wind': Investigating the Connection Between Bodily Experience, Beliefs and Transcendence Amongst Christian Surfers

Emma Ford

Through examining different understandings of the self in relation to the body's material surroundings, I argue that the same bodily action of surfing a wave can produce different experiences of transcendence depending on surfers' beliefs. This article draws on fieldwork with both self-proclaimed Christian Surfers and surfers who seem to follow a form of nature-based spirituality. Some comparisons are made with Buddhist Surfers, using texts as source material. Focusing on the interconnections between experiences of transcendent moments and particular beliefs, I aim to illuminate how the words 'religious' and 'spiritual' are used in folk discourses. Drawing on fieldwork I conducted along the North Cornwall coastline in 2007, I argue that understandings of transcendent experiences cannot be solely based on chemical analyses of brain function or observations of bodily practice. The way people frame, situate and learn to experience transcendence in turn shapes transcendent experiences themselves. I will examine the surfing body 'as an existential ground for the production of cultural form, rather than only as a source of physical and metaphorical means for its expression' (Csordas 1990:5).

In the summer of 2007, I arrived in Polzeath, Cornwall, England to conduct fieldwork in surfing communities. Kris Lannen had the tousled hair, sun-tan and laid-back attitude that many people associate with surfing 'subculture'; a man displaying aesthetic and behavioural markers of a life spent surfing the sea. Yet, as I was soon to discover, these initial impressions were of little consequence to something much deeper and inherently more fascinating for an anthropologist. Kris Lannen and Henry Cavendish were the project leadership team of 'Tubestation,' a Methodist church with a differ-

ence. The church had just reopened its doors to the public following a complete redesign of the interior from an old Methodist Church. Prior to the transformation in 2002, the congregation had dwindled to 5 people. Today it is a thriving community youth-centre and Church space with a congregation of over 70 regular attendees. 'Tubestation' not only maintains its links to the existing Methodist church network but now affiliates with the UK branch of 'Christian Surfers International,' a worldwide non-denominational mission movement that aims to evangelize surfers. Furthermore, Tubestation is part of the Church of England's 'Fresh Expressions of Church' (FX) movement, which strives to bring the 'unchurched' into Christianity through the use of 'the symbolic and the subversive' rather than imposing traditional worship practices (Williams 2004:45). FX Churches are thus created locally with the 'unchurched' community in mind; in this case local and visiting surfers to Polzeath. During the week, Tubestation functions as a community centre and features an internet café, bean bags, deckchairs, toys for younger children, a gallery for local surf artists and a Christian Surfing clothing shop (Fresh Expressions 2011). Tubestation also plays a key role in the annual 'Jesus Longboard Classic' competition (Christian Surfers UK 2007). Simultaneously, it is a fully functional Church with Bible study groups and Sunday services.

While it could be argued that 'Tubestation' merely adopts elements of local surf 'subculture' to make Christianity more accessible to local young people, I would argue something more complex is at work. In numerous ways, Tubestation deliberately incorporates bodily experiences of surfing into a church setting. Firstly, the name 'Tubestation' suggests a fixed place where 'in tube' surfing experiences can occur. Tubesta-



Figure A: Skateboarder in Tubestation – note the back-wall motif combining the cross and a wave (Fresh Expressions Website 2010).

tion project leader Henry explained ‘a tube’ is ‘where the wave bowls over your head,’ and for surfers ‘it’s the most coveted surfing experience, and has been described as a religious experience. Everything slows down, sound changes, it’s an amazing thing’ (Garrow 2011). I will re-examine the Christian Surfer perspective on whether the ‘waveriding moment’ constitutes a religious experience in due course. Another way that Tubestation incorporates visual aspects of waveriding experience into the Church is plasma screens which play surf film sequences throughout the day. Most strikingly, a skate-ramp has been built at the far end of the Church, providing opportunities for exhilarating bodily experiences for local and visiting skaters inside the church building itself. Figure A shows the skate-ramp in use during the week; notice the backdrop of a Christian cross being enveloped by a breaking wave. On Sunday, this skate-ramp transforms into the focal point for worship (Figure B).

Furthermore, during Tubestation’s opening week, Kris told me of his plans to paint the arched ceiling of the old Methodist church blue so that worshippers and local surfers would be

reminded of the experience they have inside the ‘tube’ of a wave.

Faced with these numerous examples of bodily surf experience being brought into Tubestation – a functioning Christian Church – one could easily make the mistake of concluding that Christian Surfers neatly equate the waveriding ‘religious experience’ with a Christian religious experience, so surfing slots easily into the existing religious framework. However, this article argues something much more subtle is at play. I argue that the ‘waveride moment’ has the potential to function as an unusual or even ‘paranormal’ experience because it has the potential to produce a heightened emotion called ‘stoke’ and a variety of transcendent bodily sensations.

Many board-sport enthusiasts report a heightened ‘joyful and sometimes ecstatic experience,’ which surfers, snowboards and windsurfers worldwide describe using the term ‘stoke’ which means ‘encourage or incite’ (Oxford Dictionaries 2012, Taylor and Hening 2008: 1608). The word stems from the way a fire is stoked and agitated, and once this emotion has been stirred, the adjective ‘stoked’ expresses the afterglow of that emotion (Ford and Brown



Figure B: Preparation for a Sunday service at Tubestation – note the back-wall motif is the same as in Figure A (Ford 2008- own photograph)

2006). Surfers describe riding a 'tube' of water as the epitome of such 'stoke' experiences, and it can take on an almost addictive quality. Project Leader Henry has been quoted as saying 'surfers tend to be searchers. They travel the world looking for the ultimate ride' (Garrow 2011). Surfers of many different religiosities seek to recapture the 'stoke' they experience during the waveride moment.

To understand the way transcendence is experienced and understood by surfers of varying religiosities, one must consider the relationships of body, self and the surfed wave during waveriding. Certain qualities of the waveride moment make it appear set apart from everyday experiences: 'because one is surrounded by rushing water and air, the result is a curious stasis, an illusion of dwelling in a shelter of moving water' (Shields 2004: 47). During my fieldwork in Polzeath, I met Euan, a life-long surfer from Polzeath who was not part of the Christian Surfers group. Echoing Christian Surfer Henry's as-

sertion that 'everything slows down, sound changes, it's an amazing thing,' Euan also informed me that 'time slows when you're on a wave. I've had so many other surfers say it as well, you're not necessarily thinking balance at all - you almost take on a different mindset' (Ford 2008:17). This different mindset creates the sensation of moving beyond the physical body (Poirier 2003). Within psychology, such out-of-body experiences have been described during moments of 'flow,' where through intense concentration and 'autotelic' achievement of goals, a 'self-transcendence' is experienced (Csikszentmihályi 1991:68, 64).

However, how this transcendence occurs, or whether it is experienced uniformly by different people, is not fully extrapolated within Csikszentmihályi's thesis. Using insights from phenomenological theorists, I now re-examine the waveriding moment in terms of bodily perception.

The human body is both subject and object; it is both the 'lived' means through which we perceive our surroundings and also a physical 'thing' which perceives (Husserl 1970:107). This creates the impression of a Cartesian separation of body and mind. However, in reality a body perceives as a whole entity and projects out 'toward' the world through a 'somatic mode of attention' that is limited to whatever interests the perceiving body (Bergson 1988; Csordas 1993:135; Merleau-Ponty 2002:115). This is especially apparent during movements that require intense concentration. Quick bodily reactions to the wave's ever-changing surface, which means their somatic mode of attention is directed out toward the complex of moving water and surfboard. This means that during the 'waveriding moment,' consciousness of 'self' as a separate entity disappears, giving a sense of disembodiment and bodily 'disappearance [which] arises precisely from the embodied nature of mind' (Leder 1990:115). This phenomenon is also reported amongst Ultrarunners who experience 'time stopping, ineffability, disintegration of the self, and a complete state of peace,' coherent with neuroscientists' definition of 'Absolute Unitary Being (AUB)' (D'Aquili and Newberg 1993; Jones 2004:39, 44). Surfers, therefore, speak of being 'in unity with the wave' (Kwinter 2002:29). Laviolette, a key anthropologist of coastal extreme sports enthusiasts in Cornwall, adapts Merleau-Ponty's phrase to argue 'our body as fluids connects with the fluids and the fluidity of the world' in an intersubjective relationship (Laviolette 2011:12, Merleau-Ponty 2002). Surfing is therefore what Thrift calls an 'immersive' practice, which 'questions the solidity of the world,' and places the body in a co-operative position of agency (Thrift 2007:10). Surfers 'track, from within the flows' of the waves rather than being the sole agent of their movements; waveriding is co-constructed by the surfer and the form of each wave (Kwinter 2002:28).

This intersubjectivity of world and surfer seems to create a greater sense of belonging within the ocean environment; anthropologists have argued that deep 'eco-play' promotes envi-

ronmental consciousness in sports such as surfing and rock-climbing, which have direct bodily interaction with natural surfaces (Abramson and Fletcher 2007:3; Laviolette 2006; Merleau-Ponty 2002). This could go some way towards explaining environmentalist groups such as 'Surfers Against Sewage' (SAS). My fieldwork in Cornwall incorporated SAS Beach Litter Picks, and interviewing SAS staff at their head office in Cornwall (Ford 2008; Laviolette 2006:1; Wheaton 2007). While the intersubjective nature of surfing alone cannot fully explain the existence of such environmental groups, the bodily act of surfing does seem to encourage close interrelationships with nature. Given the transcendent aspects of waveriding experience and the addictive quality of 'stoke,' it is perhaps unsurprising that some surfers describe surfing itself as their form of 'worship,' identifying themselves as 'Soul Surfers.'

'Soul surfing' is an adaptation of the term 'soul riding,' which is used in a range of board-sports including surfing, snowboarding and windsurfing (Elliot 2011; Warshaw 2005). Both phrases encapsulate the idea of a 'pure' boardrider who is engaging in their activity for the intrinsic joy and peace of the experience whilst experiencing a greater 'connection and belonging to nature,' rather than riding to impress or amass capital gain through competitions (Heywood and Montgomery 2008; Taylor 2010:125; Warshaw 2005). In reality, most adherents would be 'pragmatic soul surfers' as few can dedicate their lives to surfing alone, but the prevalence of such terms has led two scholars to examine surfers' special relationship with the environment in terms of spirituality (Warshaw 2005:552). These theorists assert soul surfers practise an 'aquatic nature religion' in which their 'oneness with nature,' and their reference to 'Mother Ocean,' stands in opposition to many orthodox religions (Humberstone 2011:495; Taylor 2007:1; Taylor 2010:125).

With this in mind, I now use two ethnographic examples from my fieldwork to contrast a Christian Surfer and a non-Christian Surfer approach to combinations of surfing and Christian symbolism. As discussed earlier, Kris, the

project leader of Tubestation, planned to paint the old Methodist Church's ceiling blue to create the visual impression of an in-tube waveride moment. By contrast, Figure C is a photograph taken at Heidi's wedding, who was not a self-affirmed 'Christian Surfer' like Kris. Instead, her beliefs seem closer to someone following a form of nature-based spirituality. I met Heidi while volunteering for a Beach Litter Pick at the Surfers Against Sewage (SAS)/O'Neill Cornish and Open Surf Competition in Porthtowan. SAS surfers have varying beliefs: from those who assert waveriding holds no spiritual significance to those of an 'aquatic nature religion,' to Christian Surfers. Heidi did not identify herself with the Christian Surfer group, but when I mentioned I was interested in spirituality and symbols, she told me about her wedding day.

Heidi's wedding was set on a grassy cliff-top field overlooking the waves. She married a South African surfer she had met at the annual 'St Agnes Surfers Against Sewage Ball,' and after their wedding they spent their honeymoon night in a Teepee in the same field. Heidi here is pictured walking barefoot through an 'archway' of foam surfboards, which her family and friends are holding up. Whilst this arrangement evidently emulates a Church 'archway,' much like the structure Kris planned to paint in Tubestation, I would argue that the surfboard arch here was chosen for its symbolic connotations as a doorway into the couple's married life, rather than being closely linked with something like the Christian Surfer movement.

While Kris' blue church ceiling and Heidi's surf-themed wedding combine Christian symbols with surfing symbols, deeper analysis is necessary to understand the differences between 'Christian Surfer' perspectives and alternative ways of being religious or spiritual. For one thing, sticking to academically deduced differences between 'religion' and 'spirituality' can actually mask the way people use these terms as ethnographic objects. For example, a surfer such as Heidi might be unlikely to call herself 'religious' in the sense of a self-proclaimed 'Christian Surfer'; her choice to conduct the ceremony outdoor on a Cornish cliff-top and walk barefoot

is in some ways reminiscent of services conducted by people of nature spiritualities. In folk discourses, people increasingly describe themselves as 'spiritual' rather than 'religious' to reject certain parts of religion; established institutions which they believe flatten 'genuine spirituality' (Fuller 2001:4).

From a 'spiritual' perspective like that of a soul surfer, spirituality is based on 'greater harmony with the sacred...[through] private reflection and private experience' rather than established public rituals (Fuller 2001:4). With this in mind, Taylor's 'aquatic nature religion' actually does not require surfers to agree with the label 'religion' (Taylor 2010:104). Indeed, due to the connotations of 'religion,' they might retort that there is a 'spiritual' element to surfing and nothing more. As I am interested in how informants experience a form of transcendence they could call either 'religious' or 'spiritual,' I consider 'religiosity' in terms of a spectrum, which refers both to how motivated someone is to follow religious practices, and also to people's lived experiences of being religious through practice and outlook. The term 'spectrum of religiosity' allows consideration of Christian Surfers and Soul Surfers on level terms by directing attention to their interpretations of bodily experiences and use of 'religious' language, even for informants who deny following a 'religion.' Christian Surfers UK state in their online mission statement that 'those of us who surf know that there is a spiritual dimension to surfing and are determined to share it' (Christian Surfers UK 2012). Nevertheless, I will now take a closer look at the Christian Surfer perspective on surfing as a form of nature spirituality to show that Christian Surfing is anything but a form of 'wave worship.' Christian Surfers do not believe that waveriding alone is enough to give full meaning to one's life, or to know God fully.

Christian Surfers Media (part of Christian Surfers International) produce an array of movies, websites, and online videos that help to spread their evangelical message, often combining surf images with personal stories of conversion with evangelical content. In a 'Christian Surfer Media' [CSM] production 'On the Rocks'



Figure C: Heidi's wedding at St Agnes, Cornwall. 'Swell' foam surfboards are used to emulate the arches of a Church

(2009) Terran Williams quotes the popular surf movie 'Riding Giants' (2004) in which 'the then-editor of *Surfer Magazine* says something that reveals the spiritual nature of surfing – he says for many of us surfing is nothing less than faith, it is paramount in our pursuit – something we give ourselves to with total devotion much like someone gives themselves to a religious pursuit' (Christian Surfers Media 2009; Peralta 2004).

However, Williams goes on to say that the 'craving' inside of surfers 'searching for that one more wave' is not inherently wrong but it will 'never ultimately satisfy us' (Christian Surfers Media 2009). For Christian Surfers, the addictive stoke of surf experience can actually create a challenge. Kris told me that for non-Christian surfers 'the reasons you do it [surfing]...is because it's part of who you are - because you need to do it in a way. It's different again if you're a Christian; like you shouldn't allow anything to become an idol in your life, like you shouldn't allow surfing to become your God

because that happens so easily, and a lot of Christian surfers struggle with that - getting the reasons why you surf right' (Ford 2008:41). Similarly, within the opening pages of the Christian Surfers Bible produced by Christian Surfers International, Skip Fyre (a Christian Surfer) is quoted as saying 'I don't want to worship the creation, but the Creator. I have a better handle on it now than I did when I was younger, but I still deal with it' (Bible Society Australia 2008:10). Accordingly then, a Christian Surfer reviewing 'Riding Giants' (2004), a film interspersed with nature spirituality, writes 'sadly, a love affair with a sport, no matter how thrilling or enjoyable, is still an empty pursuit by a fallen man. In *Riding Giants* (2004), surfers talk about the unique connection they have with the sea. Content with mere creation, these surfers seem to lack a connection with the Creator of those big waves' (movieguide.org 2005).

It is likely that Christians would see Soul Surfing as part of New Age spirituality because

New Agers emphasise 'an approach to nature as both the focus and the object of mystical energies. For example, New Age thinking often stresses grids of power like ley lines, nature goddesses and the like' (Thrift 2000:44). Therefore, in the eyes of a Christian Surfer, the phrase 'Mother Ocean' used by those of the 'aquatic nature religion' constitutes 'misattribution of agency, responsibility, and desires to objects' because surfers are mistakenly giving the ocean waves agency (Keane 1997:678; Taylor 2010:125). This is an accusation of fetishism in Keane's sense, because a group is judging the way others are distinguishing subjects from objects (Keane 1997). In Keane's ethnographic work with the Sumba, he learned that such fetishism was deemed to be 'both seductive and dangerous' by Christian missionaries, because it constitutes a slight on the 'true' agency of God (Keane 1997:678). Thus for Christian Surfers, 'surfing' alone can never be an equivalent form of 'religion,' but they can label it 'spirituality' (in the lay discourse sense). The Christian Snowboarder Watson tentatively concedes that although sublime experiences in nature can start a boardrider 'wondering' about the meaning of his or her existence, this rider is still holding on to 'the illusion of the 'false self,' an identity based largely on 'life projects' (Watson 2007:112). The contested definitions of spirituality and religion pivot around both what an authentic self should be, and how that self relates to its surroundings. These aspects are of great importance when considering transcendence.

I argue that transcendence during the 'waveride moment' is experienced differently for Christian Surfers and Soul Surfers. Although 'transcendence' has vague, mystical connotations, the pertinent aspect for my argument is that it implies movement of the self 'going above and beyond' a limit (Meyer 2006; Saler 1993:63 - emphasis in text; Smith 1988:11). I support Meyer's argument that this impression of a limit can be created by 'sensational forms.' Meyer defines 'sensational forms' as particular rituals or actions which can produce feelings, excitement and a sense of non-representable knowledge (Meyer 2006:9). Examples of sensa-

tional forms include actions such as communal rituals or the use of religious objects by believers to give the impression of a limit, thus making the 'the transcendental sense-able' (Meyer 2006:9). I would argue that where this limit is located in relation to the self and one's material surroundings is actually the point of difference between a Christian Surfer and a Soul Surfer. Both surfers practise the same sensational form (surfing a wave) and both experience 'falling away' from their own body. However, I argue Christian Surfers and Soul Surfers not only interpret this moment of transcendence differently from each other, but actually sense and experience it differently as they ride their own wave. Taking a strongly phenomenological standpoint, I argue that someone's bodily sensations and feelings of surfing a wave cannot be separated from the interpretation of that physical experience; each surfers' lifeworld combines both their beliefs and their bodily experiences amassed over time (Jackson 1996). This is the reason why the same sensational form of riding a wave can seemingly produce different experiences of transcendence for Christian Surfers and Soul Surfers.

The experiential difference comes from what surfers believe they are transcending; transcending the material body is not the same as transcending the material world in totality. I theorise that such differences create variation in the way that a Soul Surfer, a Christian Surfer and a Buddhist Surfer would use the term 'transcendent.' The bodily sensations of waveriding seem to lend themselves to feelings of unity with waves. Soul Surfers thus seem to conceive of themselves in unity with the material world of nature (which has immanent divinity). By contrast, Buddhists view the material world of nature as a distraction; the Buddha left the material world behind him (Yogis 2009). True nirvana lies beyond natural material surroundings; I would hypothesise therefore that for a Buddhist surfer, waveriding 'stoke' might be perceived as a glimpse of something beyond the material realm itself. For Christians, relations between human bodies and the religious realm seem somewhat paradoxical; on the one hand, Christianity

seems rooted to the Cartesian notion of a separate soul and body and the introspective nature of ascetic Christianity is thought to deal 'badly with issues related to bodily life' (Cannell 2006:39). Nonetheless, the material world is integral for Christians: someone's worldly actions influence their reception in the afterlife and, moreover, God placed his son on earth in flesh-form (Bible Society Australia 2008). I argue that a particular Christian person's beliefs about how the soul, the material world and the body relate to each other forms part of their lifeworld and thus affects both how they *interpret* transcendence and *experience* transcendence. Notably then it is the relationships between the material world, material body, self, soul and divinity that are inherently important in Christianity. This therefore begs the question of how Christian Surfers manage the tension between bodies, selves, souls and the material world.

To answer this, one must consider the extent to which self equates with soul for surfers of different religiosities. Soul Surfers are in a way losing their souls into the natural world: they would see body, soul and the material world as unified. For Christian Surfers by contrast, surfing would not be about a loss of soul or self through a dividual relationship with the ocean. Instead 'stoke' for Christian Surfers might be interpreted as a glimpse of the transcendent realm in which God dwells, but 'stoke' alone is not enough to know God. This echoes a memorable statement Kris made to me during my first visit to Tubestation. Referring to Christian Surfers who once held surfing as the driving force to their life, Kris explained 'later on in life they re-discover that's so not what it's about. Life is not about chasing after the wind.' From a Christian Surfer perspective, chasing surfing stoke can never be enough.

Similarly, Christian Snowboarder Nick J. Watson argues that near death experiences and feelings of awe in nature are not synonymous with the Christian notion of transcendence. He says they are neither mystical (feelings of unity with nature), nor numinous (awareness of the holy other that lies beyond nature), but rather an 'intimation of God' (Watson 2007:112). Chris-

tian Surfers, therefore, must create what they call a 'radical relationship with the creator of the ocean and the surf': the subtleties of which can easily escape the casual observer (Christian Surfers UK 2012).

It would be a mistake to assume, as Smith did, that transcendence impinges on people of all faiths in a universalised way (Smith 1988). Not only is this like imposing the category of 'religion' over highly disparate forms, but also it does not tally with anthropological work on the developmentally plastic way in which bodies perceive their everyday surroundings and spiritual phenomena. Anthropological theorists argue that bodies acquire perceptual 'keys to meaning' by amassing embodied knowledge during their lifespan (Ingold 2000:22). The world has multiple possibilities because of the varieties of ways in which bodies perceive, and interpretations of unusual phenomena such as visions and voices from 'beyond' are not beyond cultural influence and developmental learning (Csordas 1994; Merleau-Ponty and Lefort 1968).

I have argued that bodies learn to perceive transcendence through a combination of bodily experiences and broader understandings of the relationships between self, soul and material surroundings. Because of this, ethnographic information on these aspects is essential if we are to work towards understanding transcendent experiences. Measuring neurochemical function alone can only hint at a fraction of the complex phenomena of transcendence. Another potential pitfall is assuming that particular bodily actions necessarily produce similar transcendent experiences in different individuals. In the ethnographic examples I have given, the seemingly identical sensational form of surfing a wave has the potential to create different transcendent experiences for surfers across the varied spectrum of religiosity.

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Emma Ford is a PhD student in Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester, her research looks at 'Shifting perceptions of experience: the relationship between individual religiosity and social cohesion among Christian Surfers.'

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Fiona Bowie, ARC: *Afterlife communications and mediumship*, **Michelle Chamroo**, MA student, social anthropology, Bristol, **Sophia Darweish**, MA student, social anthropology, Bristol: *Shamanism*, **Franz Graf**, PhD candidate, Vienna: *Contemporary British Paganism/animism*, **Fabian Graham**, PhD candidate, social anthropology, SOAS: *Chinese spirit mediumship in Singapore and Taiwan*, **Jack Hunter**, PhD candidate, social anthropology, Bristol: *Physical and trance mediumship in Bristol*, **Paddy Ladd**, Deaf Studies, Bristol: *The spiritual and ethical dimensions of disability and eugenics*, **Rita Langer**, Theology and Religious Studies, Bristol: *Buddhist women's domestic feeding rituals (ghosts, deities etc.)*, **Genevieve Liveley**, Classics, Bristol: *Classical texts concerning death and immortality*, **Terence Palmer**, Hypnotherapist, North Wales: *Hypnotherapy, spirit release and remote viewing*, **Emily Pierini**, PhD candidate, social anthropology, Bristol: *Spirit Mediumship in the Brazilian religion of the Vale do Amanhecer*, **Tony Walter**, Centre for Death and Society, Bath: *Discourses around angels and souls in UK bereavement beliefs and practices*.

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Epistemological, Methodological and Ethical Aspects of Conducting Interviews About Anomalous Experiences

Leonardo Breno Martins

Abstract

Due to the subjective nature of various categories of anomalous experience, investigation often requires the use of interview procedures as the primary research tool. However, anomalous experience interview techniques are rarely debated, leading to important gaps in bibliographic and practical applications of the technique. This article discusses specificities of the interview in the context of research on anomalous experiences in the social sciences, sciences of religion, psychology and related areas, aiming to address some general epistemological, methodological and ethical aspects seldom mentioned in the literature, especially in the context of the extraordinary. This is theoretical research, based on a literature review and discussion of the gaps regarding the conducting of interviews in the context of anomalous experience. It discusses ontological and phenomenological research, the biases of functionalism, pathologization, prejudice and emphasis on the intrapsychic, the appropriate recognition of the alterity represented by the experiences, challenges to the subjectivity of the interviewer, posture before the interviewee, social roles during the interview, preparation for the interview, the dynamism of memory, the return to the locale of the experience, and the consideration of difficulties and the unforeseen. It is concluded that the interview is the main technique for the investigation of various types of anomalous experience. Thus, interview technique should take into account the complexities inherent in anomalies, rather than being applied uncritically.

Keywords: anomalous experience, interview, epistemology, methodology, ethics

Introduction¹

Extraordinary experiences have been reported throughout human history, and across cultures. Narratives often include personal encounters with the 'supernatural' in its various forms, many kinds of altered states of consciousness and events described as 'paranormal' in nature. In recent years the term 'anomalous experiences' has been coined to designate experiences somehow divergent from everyday experience, and/or the usual consensus reality, without any mandatory relationship with pathology or abnormality (Cardena, Lynn and Krippner 2000). Among the most investigated categories of experiences are altered states of consciousness, hallucinations in non-clinical populations, near-death experiences, mediumship, memories of 'past lives,' psi-related experiences (e.g., psychokinesis, precognition), lucid dreams, and vi-

sions of 'supernatural' entities (e.g., saints, angels, demons, aliens, folkloric characters and so on).

The relevance of the study of anomalous experiences can be recognized in three major areas. First, the experiences, narratives and related belief systems have relevance in the individual, social and historical domains, because they are part of everyday life for many people, play an important role in cultural and religious contexts, and in the social construction of reality, among many other possibilities (Cardena, Lynn and Krippner 2000). As an example of their high prevalence in many contexts, 82.7% of a sample of 306 Brazilian students and workers reported experiencing at least one type of psi-related experience throughout life (Machado 2010). Similar surveys conducted in other countries also showed significant results (e.g., Blackmore 1984;

Haraldsson 1985; Ross and Joshi 1992), suggesting that many people have anomalous experiences in different contexts. Thus, the multiple psychosocial, symbolic, mythological, religious and mystical dimensions of anomalous experiences become objects of interest for the social sciences, sciences of religion, psychology and related fields. Second, anomalous experiences may signal gaps in knowledge about the relationship between individual and cultural dimensions in everyday experience, for example, in the emergence of hallucinations among people who do not have psychiatric or psychological disorders (Cardena, Lynn and Krippner 2000). Thirdly, there is the relevance to clinical psychology and psychiatry, because experiencers can receive misdiagnosis by professionals unprepared to deal with such experiences. The simple mention of unusual personal events has historically been considered a strong indicator of underlying pathology (Almeida and Lotufo 2003; Cardena, Lynn and Krippner 2000).

Such diverse relevances invite social scientists to the study of anomalous experiences, but there are multiple methodological approaches to this kind of research. The copious narrative records, from historical documents to contemporary media, provide research possibilities increasingly utilized in the social sciences, sciences of religion, history and psychology. However, personal first-hand narratives acquire central importance amongst the various possible forms of research. Such research might consider the stages of the experiences (Zangari 2005), the cultural meanings of the episodes (Marçolla and Mahfoud 2002), the social roles of experiencers (Zangari 2005), the adherence to paranormal beliefs (Pereira Silva and Silva 2006), or the study of spontaneous cases (Alvarado 2002), among many other possibilities. Interview procedures are one of the most promising sources of data about first-hand narratives.

However, anomalous experiences have potentially distinct connotations from other subjects to which the social sciences and psychology are accustomed. Considering that the general literature on anomalous experiences is still growing, there is an even greater gap in the lit-

erature about the specificity of the interview technique in the context of anomalies. Moreover, even with regard to more traditional subjects, little has been published concerning the more subtle aspects of the interview technique. Thus, this article discusses some subtleties of interview techniques and their relevance to the field of anomalous experience research.

The Bias of Irreducible Alterity

According to Giesler (1984), scientific research into anomalous experiences can be divided into two major groups, each one rooted in a specific epistemological model. On one hand, phenomenological research focuses on uses and meanings of experiences and related belief systems as socially, historically and psychologically constructed. Thus, the meanings of the episodes are established by experiencers and their cultural background, their functions are collectively established and their alterity can be recognized (Irwin 1994). The various types of phenomenological research on anomalous experiences are usually present in social scientific and social psychological research. On the other hand, ontological research focuses on processes involved in the underlying causes of anomalous experiences (Palmer 1978, 1982; Schmeidler 1994), such as cultural and/or individual factors, physiological and psychological factors, and so on.

Although the social sciences are not accustomed to ontological research and its naturalist epistemological inheritance, it is important to remember that these are two distinct epistemological models, each one representing a particular 'cut of reality' with specific strengths and limitations. Considering just one of these epistemological models as valid (as often occurs with phenomenological research in social sciences), is the equivalent of absolutizing a research model, considering the symbolic boundary of alterity as insurmountable and overlooking profitable opportunities for interdisciplinary research. For example, although anomalous experiences are culturally shaped by social pressures, belief systems and other collective forces (e.g., Zangari 2005; Maraldi and Zangari 2009), the operationalization of these psychosocial in-

fluences (i.e., the connection between the major cultural influences and the occasional subjective experiences/behaviors of experiencers), involves little known concrete mechanisms, such as dissociation and hallucination in psychologically healthy people, neuropsychological potentialities and limits, the actual effects of psychoactive substances used in rituals, and so on. Therefore, the understanding of the 'whole picture' and the overcoming of the gaps in knowledge about anomalous experiences (as well as other difficult and related topics, such as the nature and functioning of consciousness), are only possible through interdisciplinary research, which neither underestimates different epistemological models, nor ignores researchers technically equipped to formulate and analyze ontological and phenomenological questions during interviews. The following items favor both approaches.

The Biases of Pathologization, Prejudice and Emphasis on the Intrapsychic

As a complementary opposite of the previous criticism on the exclusivity of phenomenological approaches, many authors still consider anomalous experiences as both rare and as traces of a primitive or pathological mentality (Freud 1930; Munro and Persinger 1992; Lukoff, Lu and Tuner 1992). However, in spite of the high prevalence of experiences in the populations of different cultural contexts, there are significant distinctions between anomalous and psychopathological experiences, so that, mostly, there are no significant correlations with classical disorders (Cardena, Lynn and Krippner 2000; Meneses Junior and Moreira-Almeida 2009). These findings problematize the common automatic pathologization and 'dogmatic prejudice' towards anomalous experiences (Almeida and Lotufo 2003).

Similarly, there is an historical tendency to focus on the experiences as intrapsychic constructions, rather than taking a more productive psychosocial approach consistent with recent findings (Zangari and Maraldi 2009). Accompanied by automatic pathologization and 'dogmatic prejudice,' the exclusivism of the intra-

psychic may persist in the conceptions of the interviewer (as well as the bias of irreducible alterity), in order to govern questions, interpretations of responses, attitudes towards the interviewee, resistances and other counterproductive biases that ignore a number of critical variables and promising research points.

Recognizing Alterity and Other Challenges to the Subjectivity of the Researcher

The humanities have the peculiarity of having as their object of study the same subjectivity that produces their knowledge. Depending on the epistemological model, the subject-object relationship, sometimes axiomatized, sometimes problematized throughout the history of science, earns even more obscure contours and deserves more attention. Considering most common objects of study, the literature discusses broad guidelines, including notions of: research as a dynamic process, the active roles performed by researcher and researched, the interview as a negotiation, the mismatches and conformities between the planned and the effective in everyday research, the inescapable biases of the researcher, and the socially constructed relevance of the study, among others (e.g., Bosi 2003). However, research about anomalous experiences tends to exacerbate the implicit and explicit challenges of the investigation of such subjective questions because of the initial phase of reflections about the matter and some crucial aspects of the subjectivity of the researcher, such as possible religious beliefs.

Thus, the interviewer needs to recognize the alterity represented by anomalous experiences, this alterity emerges from the dialogue between subjectivities and from the common mismatch with the perspectives of the researcher. In fact, many anomalous experiences show features that are highly outrageous to most people, researchers or not, such as the complex and standardized alien abductions, for example (Appelle, Lynn and Newman 2000). The classical research of Festinger, Riecken and Schachter (1956) on contacts with supposed aliens, and the resultant theory of cognitive dissonance, warn of the risk that the human anguish arising from mis-

matches between prior beliefs and actual data motivates the abandonment of provocative findings in favor of prior and comfortable perspectives. Such pressures can also arise from the scientific mainstream, which decides what is or is not publishable. Given the predominantly involuntary aspect of this abandonment of data and the provocative dimensions of anomalous experiences, a more rigorous than usual self-policing is required of the interviewer.

Attitude During the Interview

In direct proportion to the outrageous appearance of the episode, experiencers tend to be afraid to share their experiences with professionals, strangers, close persons and especially with people who may be judged as too critical, such as scientists. On the other hand, an enthusiastic and credulous attitude can also cause effects that compromise the interests of the research, because data can be 'enhanced' to gratify or impress the interviewer (Almeida and Lotufo 2003; Mack, 1994). Thus, the attitude of the interviewer may be decisive in the quantity and quality of collected data, in addition to causing potentially beneficial or harmful aftereffects for experiencers (Almeida and Lotufo 2003), such as the strengthening of a positive or negative self-image, and strengthening constructive or destructive beliefs about the experiences, among many other possibilities.

Thus, it is recommended that a neutral but empathetic attitude (Almeida and Lotufo 2003), cautious of stereotypes and other socio-historical variables potentially involved in the interview (Bosi 2003; Bourdieu 1993), and that promotes a 'disarmed conversation' that favours lasting bond and mutual gratitude (Bosi 2003) be employed. The gratitude resulting from the interaction tends to occur because there are benefits for all involved. Researchers can obtain information of great relevance given in a friendly, unselfish and sometimes brave way, considering the common concerns of the experiences regarding the misuse of information, public exposition and other possibilities. In turn, experiencers can obtain the rare opportunity to talk about experiences that are 'unbelievable,'

sometimes even in their own social context (but are full of emotional significance), with people (the researchers) ideally amicable, attentive, respectful and unwilling to make a pejorative judgement. Moreover, researchers can present an opportunity for the experiencers to obtain scientific information and opinions about their experiences.

Chataway (2001) explains that, unlike the historical subject-object relation, in which the researcher is the active subject of the research, while the volunteer is a passive object, fieldwork is based on a dialectical process of negotiation between two subjects: interviewer and interviewee. All persons involved are active in the process, so that not only the demands of the investigator, but also the motivations and benefits of the deponent should be taken into account. One consequence of ignoring the active role of all those subjects is the occurrence of inadvertent subjective processes that are crucial to the interests of the research, including loss of data, artificiality, barriers of communication, or voluntary and/or involuntary 'sabotage' by the respondent, among many other possibilities. Thus, the planning and implementation of the research must consider: what the participants want (as a group and as individuals), and what the ethical implications of the research *from the perspective of the participants* are. The optimum approach, therefore, is to combine the interests of the researcher and the participants, which includes a flexible research design that encompasses situational changes during the interview.

One example with ethical and methodological value is the subsequent submission of transcriptions to the respondents, to their knowledge and possible revision (Bosi 2003). If the researchers can thoroughly review their work, change and optimize it, omit sections, why should the respondents, as active subjects in the process, not also have the same right? Similarly, sometimes it is possible to allow a group discussion about the information gathered during the fieldwork because it can also have a collective belonging and might be significantly improved by input from other community members (Bosi 2003), all depending on the objectives of the re-

search. If there are particular methodological implications for which the review and subsequent change of the data by the respondent are detrimental to the study, or if the submission of the material to the social group is a possibility, these aspects should be part of the negotiation with the participants.

The Social Voices

Also, regarding the attitude of the interviewer, the collected data (narratives and other responses), may be deeply engaged to give voice to socially differentiated circumstances, such as disadvantaged and dominant social groups (Bosi 2003). The research itself is a social relation as a dialectical encounter between historically situated subjectivities, under the aegis of sociological, anthropological and psychological processes, such as belonging, conflict, domination, subservience, and rebellion, among others (Bourdieu 1993).

The historical relationship between scientists and protagonists of anomalous experiences can be understood as a relation between social groups. Since the Nineteenth Century, anomalous experiences have been considered indicators of pathology, primitivism, fraud and ways for social compensation (Freud 1930, Munro and Persinger 1992, Lukoff, Lu and Tuner 1992). Only in recent years have psychosocial perspectives emerged (e.g., Zangari and Maraldi 2009). However, there still remains a general impression among many experiencers that scientists are particularly averse to the seriousness of the episodes, while many scientists and health professionals have pejorative beliefs about the experiences of experiencers (Almeida and Lotufo 2003).

If interviewer and interviewee represent social voices, Bourdieu (1993) explains that the interview can assume the dimensions of a symbolic violence because of the risk of games of domination. So, it is not the intention to annul socio-historical differences, but an effort should be made to approximate the horizons and reduce the potential symbolic violence of the interview. In fact, many respondents consider research an opportunity to overcome domination

and expose their perspective, which has been increasingly frequent in the study of anomalous experiences. Thus, everyone involved can take ownership of the research, through respect for alterity and effort by approximation.

Practical Preparation for the Interview

Testimony is a shared work, an active product of the subjectivity of the interviewer and interviewee (Bosi 2003; Bourdieu 1993). Each participant plays a role. So, the researcher must exercise its subjectivity from the critical and reflective positioning of their own perspective and possible theoretical references, the prior collection of key topics to feed the interview and the exhaustive review of the literature (Bosi 2003). An example of an 'obvious' specificity in the anomalistic field, easily negligible due to the added pejorative value, is the study of not only the scientific literature related to anomalous experiences, but also the material produced by experiencers and non-academic authors, because it reveals the perspectives of people directly involved in the episodes (Almeida and Lotufo 2003), including: social representations, hierarchies of belief, mental images, emotional contents, promising themes to be developed during the interview, and other relevant aspects of first-hand testimonies and opinion-makers' discourses.

Contrary to the position of many enthusiasts of anomalous experiences, reports do not provide an immaculate portrait of the related episode. Like the famous 'aphorism' of Henri Poincaré presented in *La science et l'hypothèse* (1902), '*science is built of facts the way a house is built of bricks; but an accumulation of facts is no more science than a pile of bricks is a house.*' So, it is imperative to use theories or, at least, a general paradigm to guide the research planning, justify the inclusion of the interview in that planning, organize data, interpret the interview and formulate conclusions (Almeida and Lotufo 2003). The choice of theories has direct relation to the worldview of the researcher, the research objectives and the desired reach of the results. However, the specific or increased difficulties in the study of anomalous experiences include the un-

critical tendency to forcibly adapt findings to favorite theories, the insufficiency of linear criteria of psychopathology, the tendency towards hasty generalizations, the absence of reflections about the epistemological implications of anomalous experiences (such as about the mind-brain relationship; cf. Moreira-Almeida and Santos 2012), and the deficits of everyday vocabulary for dealing with various subtleties of such experiences (Almeida and Lotufo 2003).

It can be decisive for some informal investigations (such as pilot investigations), in contexts where the interviews will take place, to search for clues about the vocabulary usually employed to describe anomalous experiences, as well as other unsuspected situational variables. The language and imagery prevalent in smaller groups exemplify this issue. In several field researches, Martins (2011) tried to find people who claimed first-hand experiences related to unidentified flying objects (UFOs) and aliens. But, in many Brazilian rural contexts, such experiencers were not easy to come by. However, after considering the local folklore and everyday language use, the experiencers began to be discovered in large numbers, and quickly. Instead of asking for UFOs, flying saucers, aliens or related terms, based on a naive assumption of a notorious terminology, it proved more fruitful to talk about encounters with Mãe do Ouro (Mother of the Gold), Mãe D'Água (Mother of the Water), Carro Fantasma (Ghost Car), Boitatá (Fire Snake), Luz Fantasma (Ghost Light), among many other names, each one familiar in a particular context and strange in others. Performing a phenomenological reduction, defined as the understanding of the experience on some essential perceptual aspects (Forghieri 1993), many of these narratives were revealed to be related to anomalous lights in the sky that are similar to each other and to what urban people often call 'UFOs,' serving the interests of the research.

The Dynamic and Presentified Memory

Unlike the common-sense view, memory is not a static picture of the past. In fact, memory is a heterogeneous set of dynamic and creative

processes of reconstruction and presentification of the past (Bosi 2003). The sincerity, clarity and vividness of a reported memory do not ensure the accuracy of its content about past experiences, because mnemonic processes include prior beliefs, expectation, suggestibility, fantasies, and cultural, perceptual and cognitive biases (French 2003). Memories and related narratives are permeated and totalized by intentions and meanings, constituting a 'subjective culture' (Bosi 2003) that emerges from the encounter between socio-historical and individual dimensions. Thus, although the accuracy of memory is questionable on several grounds, it does not denigrate the common conviction of the witness about its subjective experiential content, even in the case of anomalous experience, while it certainly is not extended to the interpretations and experiences of others (Bullard 1989; Marçolla and Mahfoud 2002). Thus, memory allows research on subjective, rather than objective, truths, and present rather than past experience (Bosi 2003).

During the interview, one way to optimize research on memories is to seek, through subsequent exploratory questions, the 'constants of memory' (Bosi 2003), understood as tension points between social signs and individual memory. These points are located in the border areas between stereotypical representations, presented as automated and straight speeches, and subjective processes that require from the individual an effort of elaboration, expressing its idiosyncrasies, doubts, hesitations and silences (see also Bourdieu 1993). Often, the constants of memory have significant emotional contents and there may even be distress by attrition between social stereotypes and their personal appropriation. Thus, gaps and uncertainties often are subjective seals of authenticity, because they are beyond the stereotyped speech conditioned by culture (Bosi 2003; Bourdieu 1993).

Significant Places

Despite the lack of studies on spontaneous anomalous experiences, they have great elucidative potential for science because of their 'naturalism,' which tends to compensate for the

weaknesses of prevalent and artificial laboratory studies (Alvarado, Machado and Zingrone 1998; Alvarado 2002). Thus, research on experiences that occur outside the laboratory finds in the interview procedure a tool with superlative importance, because of the value of testimony about episodes that are rare and/or have uncertain predictability. We must consider that the spontaneity of such anomalous experiences invites fieldwork in search of contextual nuances present only, or prominently, in places where the episodes have occurred. Thus, the lack of literature on spontaneous anomalous experiences has as a corollary a lack of specific discussions about research in relevant places for the experiencers.

Thinking about interviews on any experiences, Bosi (2003) recommends that interviews take place in significant locations, which may help in the contextualisation and evocation of memories, complementing lack of content and eliciting emotions. While an overlapping of past and present, memory can be stimulated when the experiencer returns to places directly related to the topic of the interview, even if they are modified by the effects of time and cultural change, and if the respondent has also changed in many aspects. The famous aphorism of Heraclitus of Ephesus, *'no man ever steps in the same river twice,'* is appropriate for the witness who returns to the place of the alleged facts, and refers to the emphasis on the emerged contents of memory as a subjective composition of a whole and presentified person.

Thus, a practice usually tainted as pseudoscientific can regain importance, although it does require some resetting. Returning to the places where experiences have occurred is a common practice among enthusiasts of certain anomalies, such as ghost hunters and ufologists, who intend to implement reconstitutions in a tenuous manner (e.g., Reis and Rodrigues 2009). One of the elements delegitimizing this practice is the nescience about the above-mentioned dynamics of memory, so that its contents are uncritically considered to represent accurate pictures of the past. Therefore, although there is a strong possibility that such places may help the interviewee to recall specific details, they also

fuel the dynamism in which memory works. In summary, the return to significant places needs to be contextualized in the research planning with realistic expectations and used in all its fertility as a trigger for data.

Dealing With Difficulties and Contretemps

In addition to the usual information, it is recommended that the daily nuances of the research also be published. Such issues of a practical nature are rarely commented on in methodological texts, but they can be important for subsequent inquiries and fellow researchers. The study of anomalous experiences is a field under construction and so is full of inherent difficulties. In addition to the prior example of the difficulty in locating UFO experiences because of the unsuspected terms used to name them in rural areas, the same fieldwork has benefited from the negative impression that protagonists of unusual events often have about scientists (Almeida and Lotufo 2003; Mack 1994). Although the presence of the academic researcher (Martins 2011) has resulted in an initial resistance among many experiencers, his sincere opinion on the academic neglect of anomalous experiences and the importance of interviews in changing such historic tendencies reversed the resistance of virtually all reluctant experiencers. Thus, it is recommended that future researchers thoroughly publish their difficulties in the field, *contretemps* and the ways in which they were resolved (or not). Thereby, field diaries can be of great importance, and their use is highly recommended.

Conclusion

Anomalous experiences constitute a relevant topic for the social sciences, psychology, the sciences of religion and related areas because of their subjective impact, prevalence in different contexts and challenges to clinical and scientific knowledge. Experiencer testimony is the primary means to access many of these experiences due to the inherent difficulties in predicting and/or monitoring their occurrence.

However, there is a gap in the literature on epistemological, methodological and ethical as-

pects of interviews applied in the context of anomalous experiences, and even on some specific nuances of the general use of such techniques. In discussing the biases of irreducible alterity, pathologization, emphasis on the intrapsychic, challenges to the subjectivity of the researcher, the appropriate recognition of alterity, the attitude during the interview, the dynamic aspects of memory, the return to significant places, and the consideration of difficulties and contretemps, it is concluded that the interview should not be treated as a mechanical and uncritical practice. The interview, in the context of extraordinary experiences, deals with sociological phenomena and the subjectivities of both researchers and experiencers at high levels because of the intense cultural and personal implications of the topic. Essential beliefs, important ethical risks, social stigmatization and experiences on the frontier of knowledge compose a challenging and promising amalgam for science, and the practice of the interview must adjust to the complexities of the issue at hand.

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Leonardo Breno Martins is a doctoral student in social psychology at the Inter Psi Laboratory of Anomalistic Psychology and Psychosocial Processes, Institute of Psychology, University of São Paulo, Brazil. E-mail: leobremartins@usp.br

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented in Portuguese at the VI Psi Meeting in Curitiba, Brazil, in 2010.

Dr. Fiona Bowie on 'Sixth Sense, Psychometry & Spirits of Place: Everyday Experience of Invisible Forces in Contemporary Britain' at Blackwell's Bookshop, Park Street, Bristol (28/11/12)

The Lecture explored the common, everyday end of the psychic spectrum in contemporary Britain. Many people claim to have a 'gut feeling' about something, have a pre-cognitive dream or intuition, or get a particular sensation when walking into a building or visiting a certain location. We may have knowledge of somebody or some event when making contact with a physical object associated with them or it. Having such experiences is not necessarily associated with any particular belief in the paranormal. This raises the issue of the rationalisation of psychic experiences within a secular society. Rationalist, materialist discourses dominate much of the media and academia, but exposure to a coherent system of explanation, such as that given by Theosophy or Rational Spirituality, can lead to a gradual or sudden interpretive shift. Instead of viewing psychic experiences as psychological, neurological or metaphorical, they may be seen as real events, external to the individual psyche. Many of those who testify to such experiences do so within a broadly scientific rather than religious, faith-based paradigm. Contemporary physics and cosmology are seen as proposing an expanded view of the universe that can accommodate what have hitherto been regarded as religious, metaphysical or spiritual experiences. Accounts of phenomena such as déjà vu or precognition, encounters with non-human beings or telepathic communication may be universal, but rationalisations of such phenomena change in line with other aspects of contemporary life and thought. Listeners were invited to participate in the session by bringing with them examples of such phenomena from their own experience, and to think about the interpretive frameworks used to account for them (if any).

An audio recording of the talk can be found at:

<http://anthreligconsc.weebly.com/lecture-archive.html>

A Visit to Point Pleasant: Home of the Mothman

Simon J. Sherwood

Having attended and presented at the Parapsychological Association's annual convention in Durham, North Carolina, I had decided to take a road trip—well, more of a busman's holiday really—to Point Pleasant, West Virginia, a place that is no stranger to reports of anomalous phenomena. During the 1960s there were numerous reports of unidentified flying objects (UFOs), sightings of a winged humanoid figure that became known as the 'Mothman,' and mysterious 'Men-in-Black' (MIB) who pressed local residents for details of what they had seen. These phenomena were investigated at the time by writer Gray Barker¹, author of *The Silver Bridge* (1970/2008) and, most famously by, journalist, ufologist and author of *The Mothman Prophecies* (1975/2002), John Keel, who teamed up with a local newspaper reporter in Point Pleasant, Mary Hyre, and spent some time living within the community.

The Lowe Hotel

I arrived at about 4pm on a Friday afternoon. My first impression of Point Pleasant was that it was much smaller and considerably quieter than I had imagined. My satnav soon took me to Main Street, which was almost deserted and dotted with empty business premises. On the corner of Main and 4th Street, next to the Ohio River floodwall, I found the Lowe Hotel where I had arranged to stay for three nights in one of the haunted rooms, Room 314 (Bellamy, 2012). The hotel was built in 1901 and is gradually being restored to its former glory by the current owners who purchased it in 1990. It retains a sense of the past and has a lot of character.

As I checked in at the reception desk, I noticed two framed newspaper articles (Steelhammer 2007) on the wall by the elevator that described some of the ghostly phenomena that has been reported in the hotel. A young dishevelled woman has been seen dancing on the mez-

zanine level between the first and second floors. She was apparently seen recently by Rob Mariano, a presenter from the *Sci-Fi Investigates* television show, who was staying at the hotel with the crew during the filming of an episode about the Mothman (*Sci-Fi Investigates: Mothman* 2006); on the second floor a 2-3 year-old child has been seen riding a tricycle; on the third floor there is a story of a man with a beard and wearing 1930s attire having been seen in Room 314 (the room in which I was staying). It is said that a railway employee's wife stayed in this room for a week and awoke one morning to find an unknown man standing there; his reflection was later seen in the mirror whilst she was doing her hair (see Nickell 2011). In 2005, a guest returned to her third floor suite to find a riverboat captain standing looking out at the river. When asked what he was doing there he replied that he was waiting for a boat to dock. The guest noticed that something was amiss because she could not see the captain's legs; she turned to grab her camera but the captain had disappeared so she went downstairs to tell the owner, Mrs. Ruth Finley. It is reported that the guest identified the man, a Captain James 'Jimmy' O'Brien, in an old photo of the crew of the *Homer Smith* taken in 1915 (Bellamy 2012). On the top floor of the hotel is the ballroom where it is said that ghostly sounds of a string quartet can sometimes be heard (Bellamy 2012).

I later chatted to one of the owners, Mr. Rush Finley², and deftly steered the conversation around to the articles on the wall of the lobby as a means of asking about the hotel's haunted reputation. He cautiously told me that there are quite a lot of phenomena reported on the third floor, particularly taps turning themselves on and doors opening by themselves, which he had experienced himself.

The Lowe Hotel was the perfect base from which to explore Point Pleasant, with the famous sculpture of the Mothman being located



The Lowe Hotel, opposite the sculpture of the Mothman

across the street and the Mothman Museum only a few doors down in the same building.

The Mothman Monument and the Curse of Chief Cornstalk

I had expected a constant stream of tourists lining up to have their photo taken next to the Mothman sculpture, but there was no-one there (fortunately!) when I first visited it. The sculpture by Bob Roach³ was officially unveiled by John Keel⁴ during the Mothman Festival in 2003.

Next, I decided to go and take a look at the riverfront and made my way through the gap in the floodwall behind the Lowe Hotel. The riverfront park is being developed and there is a concrete amphitheatre built into the riverbank, a sheltered picnic area and a docking area for boats. Along the floodwall, towards the Tu-Endie-Wei State Park, are the exquisite Battle of Point Pleasant murals⁶ depicting the 1774 battle between the settlers and the Shawnee Indian tribe led by Chief Cornstalk; Cornstalk is commemorated in the park by a monument where part of his remains are buried.

There are various versions of the following story but, in 1777, Chief Cornstalk had gone to Fort Randolph in Point Pleasant (www.fortrandolph.org) on a diplomatic peace mission to try to avoid further bloodshed and to warn that the other Indian tribes were getting ready for battle. Chief Cornstalk explained that he and the Shawnee tribe were not keen to fight but might be forced to do so by the other tribes.

Having admitted this, Chief Cornstalk was taken hostage, together with his son, in the hope that this would prevent an attack from the other tribes. Whilst Cornstalk and his son were being held, two soldiers were ambushed by Indians and one of them was killed. As a consequence, a group of enraged soldiers took it upon themselves to seek revenge and shot Chief Cornstalk and his son while they were still in prison. As he died, it is said that Chief Cornstalk placed a curse on Point Pleasant.

Having walked around Tu-Endie-Wei park, I made my way back along the riverside towards the hotel. I stopped to take in the free country and western concert being held in the amphitheatre and watched the sunset over, what I later discovered was, the site of the old Silver Bridge that tragically collapsed in December 1967.

Harris' Steak House and the Mothman Museum

The following morning I decided to visit the Harris' Steak House just across the street for some breakfast before heading over to the Mothman Museum. The diner in *The Mothman Prophecies* movie was based upon it. The diner has been owned by Carolin Harris⁷ for over 35 years and I recognised her immediately from various documentaries that she has appeared on, when she came to serve me. The diner has a traditional look and feel to it and the walls are covered with drawings of the Mothman produced by local schoolchildren. The breakfast was excellent and great value and I can definitely recommend the eggs, bacon and shredded homefries! Apart from the movie and the festival, the diner also has another connection with the Mothman: Carolin's sister had an encounter with the Mothman, but she does not speak about it.

The Mothman Museum was set up in 2005 by Jeff Wamsley, a local man and author of two books on the Mothman (Sergeant & Wamsley 2002; Wamsley 2005). Wamsley's aim is to provide information that will enable people to make up their own mind about the reality and nature of the Mothman; while he thinks that the witnesses genuinely saw something strange

back in the 1960s, he does not admit to favouring a particular theory himself (Wamsley 2005: 11).

The museum contains displays of newspaper, journal and magazine articles relating to the Mothman, UFOs and Men-in-Black reports from Point Pleasant and the surrounding area. There is information about the Silver Bridge tragedy from December 1967; from more recent times, there are also displays of props and costumes from *The Mothman Prophecies* (2002) movie, which was loosely based upon John Keel's book. I was disappointed to discover that none of the movie was actually filmed in Point Pleasant. There are also documentaries about the Mothman available for viewing on a number of television screens. Of particular interest among the museum's exhibits are hand-written accounts from two young married couples, the Scarberrys and the Mallettes, who were out driving in the 'TNT area'⁸ in the autumn of 1966 when they encountered a strange creature (see Mothman Encounters).

The Museum also runs a Mothman minibus tour on Saturday afternoons – I had initially been disappointed to discover that the tour was not scheduled to be operating on the Saturday that I was going to be in town. However, I had e-mailed Jeff Wamsley to check and was delighted to hear back that he'd added the date to the schedule. Due to the late addition of this date, there was only one other party on the tour other than myself, which made for a much more personal experience.

The tour headed out of Point Pleasant towards the TNT area with Jeff giving an overview of the Mothman sightings and pointing out various landmarks en route, such as 30th Street where the Scarberrys used to live (and where John Keel used to stay), and the site of Tiny's Drive-in where the Scarberrys and Mallettes stopped off after their Mothman encounter. We headed into the McClintic Wildlife Management Area and pulled up alongside a small grass track that headed off behind a metal barrier—we went off to explore one of the deserted TNT 'igloos,' which was still well-camouflaged. It was refreshingly cool inside and a welcome



Inside the Mothman Museum – Simon Sherwood on the left; Jeff Wamsley, museum founder and curator, on the

break from the afternoon heat. The echoes from the unusual acoustics were quite striking. Next we reboarded the bus and ventured along the deserted roads until we reached a side road, near to the fairground area and opposite the West Virginia State Farm Museum⁹, which is where the Scarberrys and the Mallettes had been driving when they first encountered the strange creature back in 1966. On the way back to the Mothman Museum, Jeff pointed out other locations where the Mothman had been sighted and where the Scarberrys and Mallettes had seen a dead dog¹⁰ by the side of the road.

After the tour I went across the street to *The Point*, a souvenir store and café, where I had read that they served the best tea and coffee in town. As I sat and sipped my chai latte (which was indeed excellent), I overheard the shop assistant giving a photocopy of a map and directions to the TNT area and the igloos to some other tourists. Before I left I asked for a copy for myself and tipped him accordingly. I figured that I'd like to return to the TNT area the following day and take a look around on my own, which I did.

Mothman Encounters

John Keel's (1976) book *Strange Creatures from Time & Space* provides a useful summary table of the dates and features of 26 Mothman sightings that took place between September 1966 and November 1967 (Keel 1976:240-243; see also

Coleman 2002: Appendix 1). Keel (2002:88) summarised that:

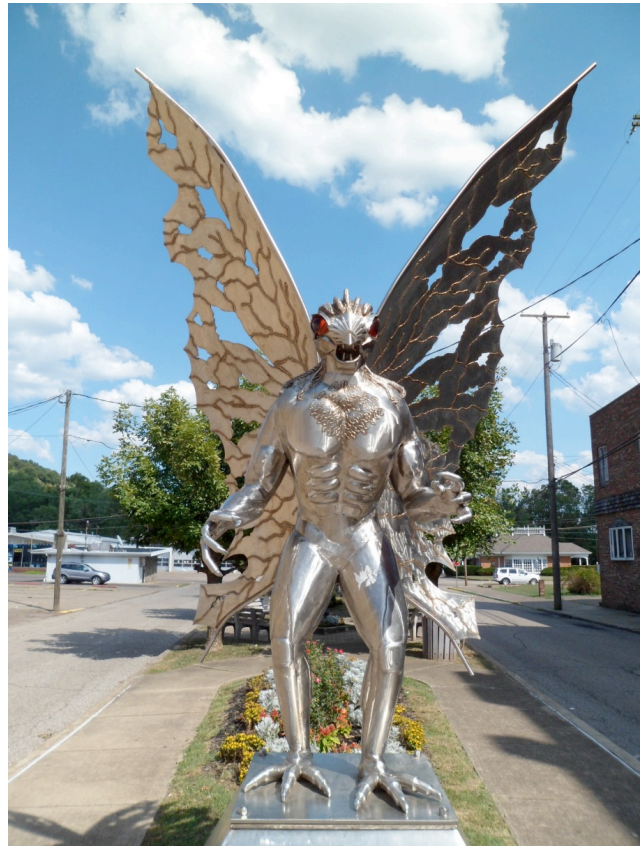
Those who got a close look at it all agreed on the basic points. It was gray, apparently featherless, as large – or larger – than a big man, had a wingspread of about ten feet, took off straight up like a helicopter, and did not flap its wings in flight. Its face was a puzzle, no one could describe it. The two red eyes dominated it.

Linda Scarberry's hand-written account of their famous encounter is reproduced and transcribed in Sergeant and Wamsley's (2002:36-59) book¹¹:

We were riding through the TNT Area on a side road by the old Power house building around 12:00 on Tuesday night Nov. 15th, 1966 when we came over this small rise in the road. All at once [Eyewitness #3] yelled for us to look at that thing in the road. I looked up and saw it go around the corner at the old Power House. It didn't run but wobbled like it couldn't keep its balance. Its wings were spread just a little. We sat there a few seconds then [Eyewitness #2] took off....We got out on Route 62 and was coming down the road and that thing was sitting on the second hill when you come into the first bad curves. As soon as our lights hit it, it was gone. It spread its wings a little and went straight up into the air. When we got to the armory it was flying over our car. We were going between 100 and 105mph down that straight stretch and that thing was just gliding back and forth over the back end of the car. As we got there in front of the lights by the Resort it dived at our car and went away. I could hear the wings flapping as if to get more speed as it went up.

They later drove back to the Power House building with an additional passenger:

We sat there with our lights out for about 15 or 20 minutes when I heard that



Sculpture of the Mothman by artist and sculptor Bob Roach on the corner of 4th Street and Main Street

squeaking sound like a mouse only a lot stronger. A shadow went across the building and the dogs started barking over on the hill across from us. [Eyewitness #1] and I saw the red eyes then and told [Eyewitness #5]. He shined the lights right on them without being told where they were. (2002:45)

Linda reported having seen the creature a number of times and described how:

To me it just looks like a man with wings. It has a body shape form with [it was a dirty grey color] wings on its back that come around it. It has muscular legs like a man and fiery-red eyes that glow when the lights hit it. There was no glowing about it until the lights hit it. I couldn't see its head or arms. I don't know if the eyes are even in a head. (2002:51)

The couples' story was published the following day, 16th November, in the local *Point Pleasant Register* newspaper and the creature was described as being 'a man-sized, bird-like creature.' Early newspaper reports referred to it as being 'bird-like' but an article by Pat Siler in the *Huntington Herald-Dispatch* on 17th November had the headline 'BIRD, PLANE OR BATMAN? Mason Countians Hunt 'Moth Man,' and seemed to be linking the sighting to a character from Batman, so perhaps this is the origin of the Mothman label (see Barker 2008:93-94; West Virginia Archives & History: Mothman <http://www.wvculture.org/history/notewv/mothman.html>).

A number of other witnesses, such as Marcella Bennett, Faye Dewitt, and Tom Ury have come forward to have their strange encounters reported in local newspapers, or books or recent documentaries (see Barker 2008; Keel 1976, 2002; Wamsley 2005). Cryptozoologist, Loren Coleman (2002:38) said that 'John Keel told me in 2001 that he literally talked to hundreds of people who had seen this creature, but that he had only taken the cream of the crop to put in his book.'

Marcella Bennett and her brother and sister-in-law had their encounter the following evening, 17th November, during a visit to her sister's house near the TNT area (Keel 1976:223-225, 2001:78-79; Wamsley 2005:71-77). As they were leaving, Marcella's brother drew her attention to a strange brilliant light in the sky. As Marcella unlocked the car door she later said that:

I remember looking down at the car keys, and I saw these legs that looked like gray feathers. They looked like a man's legs, but I did not see feet. I just started looking up towards the body, and when I looked at the shoulders and head, I could see that this thing wasn't a man. It looked more like a bird, but in my mind I knew it was too big to be a bird. (Wamsley 2005:73).

Marcella tried to run to the house but fell over on top of her daughter, whom she was carrying,

and struggled to get up again. Eventually they all made it back into her sister's house and her brother called the sheriff. Marcella's brother said that the creature had come and looked in through the front window and shoved the front door. Marcella says that she was treated for shock two days later and is still affected by her experience to this day.

Tom Ury reported seeing a very large bird that circled his car as he was leaving Point Pleasant to drive to work in Clarksburg at about 8am on 25th November 1966 (see Keel 1976:225-226, 2002:86; Wamsley 2005:97-103). He estimated its wingspan as being 10-12 feet.

Mary Hyre's niece, Connie Jo Carpenter, saw a strange figure at about 10:30 am on Sunday 27th November 1966 as she was driving home from church (Keel 1976:226, 2002:20-21). The grey figure was about seven feet tall with large round glowing red eyes that had attracted her attention and seemed almost hypnotic. She described how a pair of wings had unfolded from its back and it had risen slowly and silently straight upwards and then swooped down over her car.

Also in November 1966, Faye Dewitt (see Wamsley 2005:141-149) was returning home with her siblings from an evening out at the drive-in cinema. Her brother, who was driving, was keen to show them that the Mothman sightings were nothing more than a hoax and took them down to the TNT area on their way home. The creature was spotted running alongside their car as they were driving near to the old North Power Plant building. They speeded up to try and get away, which resulted in their car skidding to a halt on the gravel road. At this point the creature jumped onto the bonnet of their car and then ran towards and jumped up onto the roof of the North Power Plant building; Faye's brother then got out of the car and threw a piece of coal or rock up at it. Faye reported that the creature reacted to this, jumped down and then proceeded to jump over some tall hedges before opening its wings and flying away. They drove quickly back to Point Pleasant and went to the courthouse to report what had happened.

An early normal explanation for these sightings was that the witnesses had seen a large Sandhill Crane (see Eberhart 2002:355-356; Sergeant & Wamsley 2002:84-85), particularly since a number of witnesses had described the creature as being bird-like. Although Tom Ury had reported a sighting of a large bird, he believes that it was not a Sandhill Crane. There were other reports of giant birds in the area around this time (Keel 1976:227-228, 2002, e.g., p. 96). Some have suggested that the Mothman was a bird that had developed mutations as a result of chemical contaminants from the TNT area. Other possible explanations include sightings of a Turkey vulture or a giant owl,¹² especially given that some owls—particularly the Barred owl—have a red eyeshine if light is shone at them (Nickell 2002). In relation to this point, it is worth noting that in Linda Scarberry's original report (see Sergeant & Wamsley 2002:51) she said that the creature had 'fiery-red eyes that glow when the lights hit it. There was no glowing about it until the lights hit it.' Other researchers have also picked up on this point (Coleman 2006; Goerman 2002). Although there are no known six feet tall flying birds still in existence, a recent demonstration of eyewitness testimony carried out by Joe Nickell, as part of a *Monster Quest* documentary about the Mothman, is of interest. Participants were asked to drive along the road at night in darkness and estimate the heights of three different illuminated mock-up Mothman silhouettes¹³ positioned by the roadside. There was wide variation across the participants in terms of their estimates and some overestimated the size of the Mothman cut-outs. This illustrates the difficulty of making accurate measurements of objects' size and height in darkness from a moving vehicle when there are limited cues available. Besides birds, other proposed explanations for the strange sightings include balloons released as part of a school project, hoaxes, mass hysteria, some kind of human experiment or an extraterrestrial being, given the numerous UFO sightings in the area at the time.

UFO Sightings and the 'Men in Black'

The movie *The Mothman Prophecies* is fairly loosely based upon John Keel's book of the same name and has a strange character in it called Indrid Cold. I think it is worth pointing out the real-life origins of this character and his UFO connection: At about 7pm on 2nd November 1966, Woodrow Derenberger¹⁴ was driving on Interstate 77 towards Parkersburg when a dark grey metallic UFO landed in front of him causing him to stop. Derenberger reported that an odd-looking man, who was grinning broadly, emerged from the object, approached his car and communicated with him telepathically. He told him not to be afraid as he meant him no harm and asked what the lights were in the distance, to which Derenberger replied that it was the city of Parkersburg. The UFO, which had been hovering about 50 feet off the ground, then descended and the stranger reboarded saying that they would meet again soon. Derenberger's story was reported by the press and other people are said to have come forward¹⁵ to confirm that they had seen a man speaking to a van driver stopped on the roadside on the night in question and had seen a strange object in the sky. A couple of days later, Derenberger was riding with a co-worker when he said he felt a tingling sensation in his forehead and began to receive telepathic messages again from this stranger who was apparently called Indrid Cold and was from a planet like Earth called Lanulos. (Barker 2008, chapters 6, 8; Keel 1976:184-186, 2002:63-69, 79-80; Sheppard 2004, chapter 2). Derenberger was later visited by the 'Men in Black' (Keel 2002:80, 140) and also by a man claiming to be from NASA security police who invited Derenberger and his family to visit Cape Kennedy for a week where Derenberger was questioned about his encounters with Indrid Cold (Keel 2002:105-106). Derenberger claimed that Indrid Cold did visit him again and took him aboard his spacecraft on a visit to Brazil and much farther afield to the planet of Lanulos (Keel 2002:141, 240).

Both Gray Barker and John Keel were known for their interest in UFOs. Apart from the Mothman sightings, there were numerous other

unidentified flying objects—sometimes associated with apparent interference with televisions and telephones and cars—reported in and around Point Pleasant in 1966 and 1967 (e.g., Keel 1976:232-233, 2002:50-51, 60-62, 103-105, chapters 10-11; Sergeant & Wamsley 2002:102-124; Wamsley 2005:35, 79-95). Some witnesses were later visited, or had their homes staked out, by strange men who often seemed out of place or dressed, spoke or acted in an odd manner. Sometimes they seemed to have invented a pretence for their visit. These 'Men in Black' (MIBs), who had been reported in relation to previous UFO cases elsewhere, often wore black or dark suits, overcoats and hats and drove around in black cars (see Barker 2008, chapter 12; Keel 2002; Wamsley 2005:82-89). Typically, they ask the witnesses questions about their experiences and urge them to keep quiet about them. One possible explanation for these 'Men in Black' is that they are government agents of some kind (Barker 1958); Woodrow Derenberger thought they were from the Mafia (Keel 2002:140).

Local reporter Mary Hyre had a number of encounters with the 'Men in Black' and felt quite frightened by them (Keel 1976:234-235, 2002, 109-110; Wamsley 2005:82). About a week after the Silver Bridge disaster, Mary was visited by two short men in black overcoats. One of them said he'd heard there had been a lot of flying saucer activity in the area and asked her if she'd been told not to publish reports about it and what she'd do if someone did. She replied that she would tell them to go to hell. Later that same afternoon another stranger dressed in a black suit, claiming to be a UFO researcher¹⁶ and friend of Gray Barker, came by asking similar questions (Keel 2002:15-18).

Other Strange Phenomena

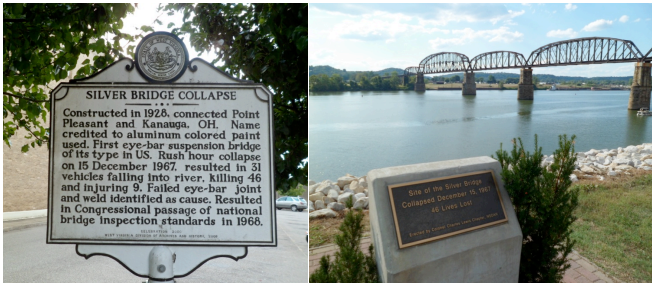
Numerous other strange phenomena were reported around the time of the Mothman and UFO sightings in Point Pleasant and the surrounding area, some of which seemed to be connected to John Keel (Keel 2002). Some people who had witnessed strange lights in the sky later reported that they had experienced haunting/poltergeist phenomena in their home,

such as doors banging or being found unlocked, strange voices, bangs and other noises were heard, they smelt anomalous cigar smoke, pictures fell off the walls, objects disappeared and reappeared in unusual locations, and lights and televisions seemed to malfunction (e.g., Keel 1976:186-188, 229-230, 234, 2002:85, 94, 156, 161-162, 169-170, 221-222). Some witnesses, including Keel and Mary Hyre, experienced strange phone calls; for example, the phone would ring and either there would be no-one on the other end or else they would hear Morse code-like electronic beeps or incomprehensible metallic voices (Keel 1976:187, 2002:135, 153-155, 162, 174, 178, 189-190; Wamsley 2005:85, 103). However, one must consider these with a note of caution; there was a great deal of excitement caused locally by the publication of the sightings of a strange creature and other UFOs. This resulted in hundreds of locals driving around the TNT area at night looking to see them for themselves (Keel 1976:187, 224, 233, 2002:77, 161; Wamsley 2005:76-77). Witnesses who had already had some strange experiences, and who believed that strange beings or forces were at work in Point Pleasant, might have been more inclined to give paranormal explanations for other experiences in that kind of a climate.

The Silver Bridge Collapse

Tragedy struck Point Pleasant at around 5pm on 15th December 1967 when the Silver Bridge (which used to be adjacent to the railway bridge) collapsed causing the queues of rush-hour traffic to plunge into the river below (see Wamsley 2005:111-54) – 46 people were killed. The collapse was caused by a failure of one of the eyebars on the bridge supports (LeRose 2001; National Bureau of Standards 1971).

Mary Hyre had previously reported a dream of Christmas packages floating on a river and people drowning that she thought might have been precognitive (Keel 2002:306, 328). It is said that there were sightings of the Mothman near the bridge prior to the collapse (e.g., Sergeant & Wamsley 2002:25); Marcella Bennett said that her uncle had been one such witness:



The memorial plaque near the site of the old on-ramp

The memorial plaque on the site of the Silver Bridge

He lived in an apartment on Main Street, in downtown Point Pleasant, overlooking the Ohio River and right next to the Silver Bridge. He told me that before the bridge fell that he saw what I saw, a man that looked like a bird, and that it went over the bridge. (2002:77)

Some people believe that the Mothman was connected to the disaster, either as some kind of a warning or as part of the cause. There were also rumours that the bridge collapse was due to Chief Cornstalk's curse.

Later on the Saturday afternoon I visited the two memorials to those who died which are located by the riverside and also near to where the on-ramp to the bridge used to be.

On the Sunday afternoon I visited the Point Pleasant River Museum which features a model of the bridge, debris from the collapse and explanations of what happened. There are also written and televised accounts from survivors, which really make you appreciate the speed with which the event unfolded and how lucky those who managed to survive were.

In summary, I had a very enjoyable few days in Point Pleasant finding out more about the Mothman and staying at the Lowe Hotel. I find it intriguing that there were so many different reports of different anomalous phenomena, which may or may not have been linked in some way, in such a small place over a particular time period in 1966-1967. It has inspired me to look further into Keel's idea of these apparent 'windows' and to find out about other areas where there have been reports of strange creatures, UFOs and paranormal phenomena.

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¹ Readers should be aware that Barker has been accused of embellishment and hoaxes in his work (see J. C. Sherwood, 1998, 2002).

² On a musical note, Mr. Finley also told me that during a visit to a UK pub some years ago he went over to congratulate a woman following her impressive karaoke performance; some years later he was surprised to recognise the same woman on a television show that he was watching. The woman in question? Susan Boyle!

³ Sculptor Bob Roach has also created statues of Chief Cornstalk and Colonel Lewis near the floodwall as part of a remembrance of the Battle of Point Pleasant.

⁴ During the ceremony, John Keel was a 'man-in-white' rather than a 'man-in-black' and the white suit that he wore is now on display in the Mothman Museum.

⁵ 'Tu-Endie-Wei' means 'point between two waters' (<http://www.tu-endie-weistatepark.com>).

⁶ These murals were painted by artist Robert Dafford using special paint from Germany that is meant to last for 100 years (http://www.pointpleasantwv.org/Main_Pages/Previous_Projects/BattleMural.html).

⁷ Carolin Harris and Jeff Wamsley co-founded the annual Mothman Festival in 2002.

⁸ The 'TNT area,' as it is known locally, is about six miles away from Point Pleasant and is the site of the former West Virginia Ordnance Works. This was built during World War II to manufacture the explosive T.N.T. (Trinitrotoluene) and munitions, which were then stored in a number of 'igloos.' Some of these igloos are still used to store explosives and in May 2010 one of them exploded (<http://www.wsaz.com/news/headlines/93914124.html>). The TNT area is now part of the McClintic Wildlife Management Area and has been part of a clean-up operation by the Environmental Protection Agency.

⁹ The tour usually stops off here to look at some exhibits of birds that might have been possible candidates for the Mothman sightings but, due to an ongoing event at the farm, we were not able to do so on this occasion.

¹⁰ This is said to have been Merle Partridge's German Shepherd, Bandit, that had gone missing the previous night (14th November) having chased after some strange red lights which they had seen at Merle's farm in Centerpoint (see Barker, 2008, chapter 1; Wamsley, 2005, pp. 47-54). However, whether this was Bandit was never confirmed. Prior to this sighting, the family's television had started making a strange high-pitched sound before the tube had exploded. The following morning Merle went outside to look for Bandit and recalled that 'You could see the dog tracks going down through the wet grass. You could see the dog's path. When I got down there, you could see these dog tracks all around this huge circle of mashed down grass. The circle was about 40 or 50 feet in diameter. That is when I started thinking, *There had been something here besides a helicopter.*' (Wamsley, 2005, p. 50). Newspaper reports at the time, and Barker's book (1970/2008), suggested that Merle had seen red eyes like bicycle reflectors but, in a recent interview, Merle said that 'When I looked down there, all I could see were red lights going around. They were not eyes or anything like that. They were intermittent red lights.' (Wamsley, 2005, p. 50).

¹¹ Many thanks to Jeff Wamsley for granting me permission to quote these accounts from his books.

¹² A large owl was shot by a local farmer in December 1966 (see Wamsley, 2005, pp. 104-105).

¹³ These Mothman cut-outs are on display in the Mothman Museum.

¹⁴ Woodrow Derenberger's experiences are described in a rare book published in 1971 called *Visitors from Lanulos*. There is an interview with him in 1966 available at <http://www.freewebs.com/weirdtales/thetruthonindridcold.htm>

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¹⁵ One person, a psychology student at the time called Thomas Monteleone, claimed that he too had met some visitors from Lanulos. Keel and Derenberger went to interview Thomas and, although Keel was initially suspicious that 'the whole thing was some kind of put-on,' he ultimately concluded that 'Tom was on the level' (see Keel, 2002, pp. 241-246). Unfortunately, years later Monteleone admitted that his claims had been a hoax and that he had deliberately set out to contradict parts of Derenberger's testimony (see Clark, 2002, p. 41).

¹⁶ This stranger also visited Connie Carpenter and the Scarberrys asking similar questions and asking about Mary Hyre and her relationship with John Keel; they all found this stranger to be rather odd, (Keel, 2002, pp. 23-24, 26-28).



Dr. Sherwood completed a BSc in Psychology at the University of Portsmouth in 1992 followed by an MSc in Occupational Psychology at the University of Sheffield in 1993. In the summer of 1994 he completed the Summer Study Program (SSP) at the Rhine Research Center and gained a PhD in Psychology, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), from the University of Edinburgh in 2001. He was presented with the Gertrude Schmeidler Outstanding Student Award at the Parapsychological Association Convention in 2000.

He has been working full-time as a lecturer in Psychology at University College Northampton since 1998. In December 2002 he completed a Postgraduate Certificate of Teaching in Higher Education (PGCTHE).



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**Steve Abrams:
Psychedelic Trickster
David Luke**

I got to know Steve in 2006 after having seen his name down to speak at the LSD conference in Basel, Switzerland, to celebrate Albert Hofmann's 100th birthday. Steve was billed in the programme to give a talk on 'synchronicity and the problem of coincidence in the psychedelic experience.' I was just finishing up my PhD on parapsychology and luck at the time, and on the side was doing survey research on psychedelics and extrasensory perception (ESP), so I had a yearning to hear what he had to say.

Steve's blurb on the conference website said that he intended to draw upon Jung and Whitehead, 'to resolve the contradiction between the ubiquity of meaningful coincidence and the paucity of experimental evidence for so-called psychic phenomena.' It also said he was based in the UK. This was a stroke of luck, as it happened, because I had been lamenting the lack of any serious academic interest in both psychedelics and ESP existing this far from California-circa-1967. Anyone who juggled Jung, LSD, and 'ESP research at Oxford secretly funded by the CIA' in their bio had my attention. Unfortunately, I never made it to Basel for that conference, but then neither did Steve. We finally met up at his place in Notting Hill, London, and he told me his story.

In 1957, just starting out in academia as an undergraduate, aged 18, Stephen Abrams wrote a letter to C.G. Jung about his desire to use parapsychology to test the great psychologist's idea of synchronicity. Surprisingly, Abrams received an in-depth reply, initiating a communication that continued until Jung's death just a few years later (Adler 1976).

Abrams completed his psychology degree at the University of Chicago, his hometown, where he was president of the Parapsychology Laboratory between 1957 and 1960 (Melton 2001). He began to work as a visiting research fellow dur-

ing his summer breaks with the patriarch of parapsychology at that time, J.B. Rhine, at his famous laboratory at Duke University in North Carolina (Black 2001). Upon completing his degree, Abrams moved to the UK and became an advanced student at St. Catherine's College at Oxford University from 1960 to 1967. He headed a parapsychological laboratory at the university's Department of Biometry and, having some skill in hypnosis, investigated extrasensory stimulation of conditioned reflexes in hypnotized subjects (Melton 2001). He was also responsible for organising the first conference outside of the US of the American-based Parapsychological Association, at Oxford University in 1964 (Luke 2011).

His PhD studies at Oxford were part-funded by the CIA through the Human Ecology Fund, a secret front organization for the CIA's classified MK-ULTRA mind control project. It was under the auspices of MK-ULTRA that the CIA funded numerous academic projects investigating LSD and other methods of altering consciousness, with the aim of finding truth serums and techniques for interrogation and brainwashing.

Embarking on his PhD, Abrams, though he didn't know it at the time, was about to depart on a whirlwind ride to Kansas, via Alice's rabbit hole. Dr. James Monroe, the executive secretary at the Human Ecology Fund, based in New York, had sent Abrams a letter in April 1961 saying that they were interested in assisting his ESP research at Oxford. Abrams, having no idea who the HEF were, arranged to travel back to the states to meet with Monroe to discuss funding. Prior to leaving, he met with Arthur Koestler, the writer who would later leave almost his entire estate to establish a parapsychology research unit and chair at the University of Edinburgh. Koestler had given a talk in London for the Society for Psychical Research and invited Abrams

along afterwards for dinner, along with the anthropologist Francis Huxley – (son of Sir Julian Huxley, and nephew of Aldous Huxley). Koestler was heading to America to attend a conference on mind control organized by another secret CIA front organization, called the Joshua Macy Foundation – although he probably didn't know it at the time because the CIA were operating at a very underground level. Abrams suggested that Koestler go to Duke University to visit his old mentor J.B. Rhine at his parapsychology lab, and Huxley suggested that Koestler should also go and see Leary at Harvard.

Taking the slow route home, Abrams sailed to New York and met with James Monroe and Preston Abbot, the programme director of the Human Ecology Fund. Following a seemingly successful meeting with his new potential funders, he caught a flight to Duke University to see Rhine, and changed planes in Washington. 'Just for a laugh' (Black 2001:50) he tried calling the CIA via the operator and asked to speak to the director regarding recent communications he had had with the Russian parapsychologist, Leonid Vassiliev - the first cold war Russian to communicate across the iron curtain about ESP research. He was told that someone would come to meet him at the airport within the hour. Abrams was met by the MK-ULTRA second-in-command, Robert Lashbrook, and discussed his Soviet link up.

Having called the CIA so soon after his meeting with Human Ecology Fund executives, the CIA did a security check on Abrams at Duke University. Abrams later reasoned that they must have thought that he was either 'telepathic or taking the piss' (Black 2001:51) because the link between the HEF and the CIA was a very deep national secret at that time. Abrams later discovered, through freedom of information access years later, that he had been given security clearance concerning his knowledge of the link, which seemed better than what must have been a fairly grisly alternative. Their security check would also have discovered that Abrams was about to take psilocybin with Rhine any day, and must have put them in mind of the CIA's earlier project, codenamed ARTICHOKE, a fore-



Steve Abrams (1938-2012)

runner of MK-ULTRA that aimed, as part of its mind control remit, to discover drugs which could be used to develop telepathy and clairvoyance (Lee & Shlain 1985). ARTICHOKE had sent agents to Mexico with R.G. Wasson in 1952 on one of his seminal trips to discover the Psilocybe mushroom cult among the Mazatecs (Stevens 1988). Many years later, in an interview with David Black (2001:51), Abrams looked back upon his unwitting intuitive manoeuvres and declared that, 'I was rather in a position where I could write my own ticket. I was asking the spooks to give me money to study spooks. And to overcome their reserve I had to spook them.'

Arriving at Rhine's lab, Abrams was invited to take part in a drug experiment the following day and signed a consent form. Koestler had taken up Huxley's suggestion and had been to see Leary at Harvard a week earlier, and the pair were flown down to Duke by Richard Alpert (Ram Dass) in his private plane. Leary had brought a bottle of psilocybin pills with him

and, along with Rhine and his research team, everyone got high, and even attempted some ESP experiments, although there was apparently way too much laughter for the tests to have been taken seriously (S. Abrams, personal communication, August 14, 2006; S. Krippner, personal communication, January 19, 2006). Kessler had a bad trip in which he 'lived through world war three' (S. Abrams, personal communication, April 25, 2009). Rhine, on the other hand, was quite inspired and kept Leary's bottle of pills for further research, although he had terminated the nascent psychedelic ESP project by the end of the year, despite an improvement in test scores (Horn 2009), and not before Steve had his first trip.

Curiouser and curiouser, upon returning to the UK, Abrams found in his letterbox a cheque for funding from the HEF as well as a letter from Prof. Vasiliev offering copyright on a manuscript in Russian on his telepathy research, hoping that Abrams could get it published in English. Abrams wrote to Lashbrook at the CIA asking for help in getting the book translated, but Lashbrook, seeing that Abrams had security clearance, wrote back in January 1962 telling him not to write to the CIA because the HEF would deal with it, by which point the penny must have truly dropped for Steve.

Later that year the Human Ecology Fund programme director Preston Abbott arrived in the UK to meet with Steve and asked him how his ESP research was going. Abrams asked him about getting Vasiliev's manuscript translated but Abbott replied that it would cost too much. Surprised at this, Steve surmised that Abbott was not aware of the secret CIA relationship with HEF and so, deciding to have some fun, said, 'But, the agency said you'd be glad to do it' (Black 2001:53). Abbott initially turned white, and then fumed, having previously turned down an invitation to work for the CIA he was not best pleased to find the agency were his paymasters after all. According to Abrams, 'He phoned long distance to Harold Wolff, the chair of the Human Ecology Foundation, and insisted that James Monroe - his superior - be fired on the spot, as he was' (Black 2001:53). A massive

reshuffle began at the Human Ecology Foundation and most of the board of directors were replaced in a short time. In the late 1970s, Abrams met Abbott again in London and the former HEF director informed him that half of the organization's staff had had no idea that they were being run by the CIA.

After shooting himself spectacularly in the foot with the CIA funding, Abrams patched up his finances with grants from more legitimate funders to continue his PhD research, such as the Perrott scholarship, a bequest administered by Trinity College, Cambridge, set up to fund psychical research (i.e., ESP research). But Abrams was never awarded the qualification, even though he submitted a worthy thesis and sat his viva voce in 1967, largely because he had by then become one of UK's leading drug law reform activists and had organised a number of demonstrations and other actions with Oxford students during the sixties, which had embarrassed the university.

Having just formed SOMA, the Society of Mental Awareness, Abrams wrote an essay on 'The Oxford scene and the law' that was covered by the student newspaper and which claimed that cannabis users were treated more harshly than heroin users by the law, because heroin addiction was still considered a medical problem at that time. In January 1967, *The People* newspaper got hold of the story and emphasized the claim that 500 Oxford students were using cannabis. The Senior Proctor at Oxford had claimed that about 30 people were using dope and that they were all nervous wrecks. In response, and on behalf of the one Oxford student being prosecuted for weed, a lively ensemble of about 500 students marched through Oxford in protest of the cannabis laws. The story escalated and in February the University Student Health Committee heard evidence from Abrams who argued that the Home Secretary should be pressed to set up an investigation, and the committee did just that. The Government responded positively in April by setting up the Wootton Committee to investigate hallucinogens, but not cannabis (Black 2001).

Things then continued to hot up in the press with Paul McCartney saying he had seen God on LSD, and with Mick Jagger and Keith Richards in court on cannabis and speed charges. Following the heavy sentencing of the two Stones at the end of June a number of angry protests, backed by SOMA, began in London, and the musicians were released immediately on bail. A massive legalize pot rally in Hyde Park was organized and presided over by Abrams, who had devised a plan to draw flack away from the Beatles' acid image and take the pressure off the Stones by placing a one-page advert in *The Times* stating that, 'The law against marijuana is immoral in principle and unworkable in practice.' The text of the advert was prepared by Abrams and was paid for secretly by the Beatles, who also signed it, as did Nobel Prize winner Francis Crick, and a number of MPs, leading medical experts and other notable public figures. The advert did its job and sparked a national debate, ultimately influencing the Wootton Committee to go beyond their initial remit and report on cannabis, stating that, 'The long asserted dangers of cannabis were exaggerated, and that the related law was socially damaging, if not unworkable' (Black 2001:73).

By July 1968, the *News of the World* were regarding Steve as the UK's equivalent of Timothy Leary and ran a front page story with a maniacal image of Abrams stating that, 'This dangerous man must be stopped.' This had come about because Abrams had discovered a loophole in the law that enabled cannabis tincture to be prescribed freely even though cannabis in its ordinary state was illegal. Abrams had met with Bing Spear, the head of the Drug Inspectorate at the Home Office, who had thereafter made arrangements with the UN to increase the UK's meagre legal cannabis importation quota some 17-fold to 254 kilos. As a result the organisation Abrams had founded, SOMA (which had Francis Crick, Francis Huxley and psychiatrist R.D. Laing as directors), was able to manufacture cannabis tincture for prescription by medical doctors that were SOMA members, such as the medic Sam Hutt (better known as the country musician Hank Wangford). SOMA were also re-

searching alkaloids derived from cannabis, and investigated the use of pure THC, the main psychoactive chemical in cannabis. After some initial problems with the formula, which was corrected by Crick, SOMA's chief chemist Dick Pountain manufactured an experimental batch of seven grams of relatively pure THC at the cost of £1,600 – a considerable amount of money at the time. Abrams, as he delighted in telling me, smoked the whole thing over a weekend with his acquaintances and remarked that, 'It was like the very finest Moroccan kief with a hint of cocaine. It was very, very good dope' (Black 2001:75).

Listening to Steve's stories – all well evidenced – over the years I came to admire his association with what Jung identified as the trickster archetype. He was an exceptional and humorous intellect who could run rings around people, never suffered fools, and yet seemingly always remained honest and compassionate – no matter whom he was dealing with. He was also an exceptional raconteur and named the good and the great among his friends, be they leading musicians, politicians, scientists, psychiatrists, parapsychologists, activists or LSD-ring mastermind criminals on the run.

Perhaps my favourite story of Steve's concerned the occasion he and R.D. Laing were visited by detective inspector Richard Lee, the lead officer of Operation Julie – the UK's largest LSD bust that ended in the arrest of 130 people and put an end to a conspiracy that had produced over 100 million doses of acid in Britain over a six-year period. Because of their association with one of the ring leaders of the Brotherhood of Eternal Love – the world's biggest LSD manufacturers, busted in 1972 – the police had been interested in Abrams and the psychiatrist Laing, a leading figure in the anti-psychiatry movement who had pioneered the use of LSD therapy for schizophrenia. Through Bing Spear at the Home Office, Lee made arrangements to visit Laing and Abrams in 1977, shortly after the bust, for a 'social,' and arrived at Laing's place with his driver. Informing them both that they were in the clear over Operation Julie, the four of them had a frank discussion, over copious

whiskies, concerning psychiatry and the politics of LSD and cannabis. Lubricated by the scotch, Laing and Abrams were able to convince both officers of the folly of the drug laws and urged them both to quit the force, which, upon staggering back into work later that day, they both did, as did several other members of the Operation Julie team (Black 2001).

Fast forwarding to the Basel conference in 2006 that neither Steve nor I made it to, Steve never gave the talk as he was unable to leave his house in Notting Hill, London, to make the trip, because of his emphysema. To my knowledge Steve never left the house from that point on as he had difficulty breathing, and was ultimately unable to breathe at all without a near continuous supplement of oxygen throughout the day. That is until he re-discovered cannabis tincture, and had it supplied by an underground dispensary in London, which, after only one dose, allowed him to come off oxygen for several hours a day. He continued with his own treatment against his doctor's wishes, and it afforded him a lot of relief. He had hoped to further investigate the benefits of cannabis tincture and aerosol as a vasodilator in the treatment of emphysema. Unfortunately, before he was able to take his research any further than mere personal assay, Steve died at his home in Notting Hill on 21st November 2012, aged 74 (he was born 15th July, 1938).

There was no funeral arranged for Steve, as he had no close living family members, and in any case he had not been back home to America for many decades. It was decided among a few close friends that instead there will be a picnic in the park in mid-July, 2013, to mark his passing, some 46 years since Steve organized the first 'Legalize Pot Rally' in Hyde Park on Sunday, 16th July 1967. The 'Abrams Picnic,' organised by Jeff Dexter, will have no speeches, only poetry, and will be on Greenwich Park from 1pm, Sunday, 14th July, 2013, and will coincide with the lunch break of Breaking Convention: A Multidisciplinary Conference on Psychedelic Consciousness being held next to the park in King William Court, at the University of Greenwich - <http://breakingconvention.co.uk>

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Dr. David Luke, is past President of the Parapsychological Association, and Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Greenwich, UK, where he teaches an undergraduate course on the Psychology of Exceptional Human Experiences. He is a guest lecturer at the University of Northampton, UK, for the MSc in Transpersonal Psychology and Consciousness Studies. As a writer and researcher he has a special

interest in altered states of consciousness and he has studied ostensibly paranormal phenomena and techniques of consciousness alteration from every continent of the globe, from the perspective of scientists, shamans and Shivaite.

Turning to the Affective in Direct Experiences: An Interdisciplinary, Investigative Quest

Christopher Laursen

In the study of history, there are significant limitations that make it challenging for the historian to access people's direct experiences. Direct experiences, in my view, are among the crucial elements to the study of extraordinary things across scholarly and investigative disciplines. As someone who studies history with a background in journalism – and who wishes to practice scholarship in ways that resonate with the wider public – I address this discussion piece to anyone who investigates the past and present of extraordinary things. Putting aside concerns about the 'reality' of supernatural claims, affective responses that arise from such experiences speak to the ways in which knowledge and meaning is made for individuals and for cultures. For each event, one or two major interpretations may persist in the public sphere, disseminated through media, scholarship, and word of mouth, but there always remain an unsung multitude of meanings for those who directly experienced something extraordinary. Since the 1960s, a rewarding project among historians has been to recover the voices of those people (the working class, women, minorities, medical patients, etc.), whose lives and affective experiences were largely absent in the hagiographic historical narratives of those who held power and popularity. This project can be forwarded in the interdisciplinary study of extraordinary experiences; the study of emotions and affect provides a substantial inroad to make this happen.

The experient, a term common in psychical research and parapsychological literature, refers to the individual who directly witnessed, observed and participated in an anomalous event or phenomena. Generally speaking, it is evident that experient's emotions and what these experiences mean to them are in tension with the views and mandates of various individuals who

do not necessarily experience the extraordinary events in question for themselves, but they become involved in the interpretation of them given their proximity or personal and professional interest. These interactions between experients and family members, friends, neighbours, law enforcers, journalists, medical practitioners, religious leaders, sceptical thinkers, psychical researchers, parapsychologists, ghost hunters, ufologists, cryptozoologists and so forth who arrive to investigate, either invited or unsolicited, involve debate, negotiation, and conclusions that shape knowledge about what happened. In investigating extraordinary things – whoever you may be – careful attention should be given to the initial affective response of the experient(s) to what happened, and to their emotional reactions throughout the process of investigation. For one, these individual, emotional responses speak to the experient's personalities, worldviews, and the important meanings that the event(s) conveyed for them. Of equal importance, the study of affect provides an opportunity for investigators to be self-reflexive – aware of their own investigative strategy and ideological slants that become part of the story, so to speak. While investigators have attempted to employ objective strategies, studies show that subjectivity continues to persist in all types of disciplines. There is a large body of scholarly literature that critically examines notions of objectivity (for example in the history of science by Novick 1988; Daston and Gallison 2007; and Oreskes and Conway 2010).

The point I wish to make in this discussion piece is that giving experients the opportunity to relay their affective experiences in investigative work complicates the investigative process, makes it messy even, but it also benefits it in that direct experiences may provide new avenues in understanding what happened or what

is happening. It can potentially progress studies of anomalous events and experiences as well as our historical understanding of them in any number of ways. Above all, it better enables respect of the experient, without whom there is no extraordinary thing to investigate. It gives the experient a prominent voice in accounts and studies that adds a crucial perspective of how knowledge is made from individual experiences, in the case of extraordinary things, experiences that do not fit the norm. From this piece, I hope to create an active discussion of the ways in which affect and direct experience can better be documented and analysed in interdisciplinary studies, warranting follow-up articles that I can write to develop methodologies and practices that benefit investigators of all kinds.

The Affective Turn

In the affective turn that has emerged over the past two decades or so, historians have utilized a variety of theoretical tools developed through, for example, psychoanalytical, feminist, and queer studies, to assess how 'discourses of the emotions emerge, circulate, are invoked, deployed and performed' (Athanasίου, Hantzaroula and Yannakopoulous, 5). In recent years, a wider range of historians have addressed the affective turn in a broader selection of topics, for example the special focus section, 'The Emotional Economy of Science,' in the history of science journal *Isis* (Vol. 100, No. 4, December 2009), or the work of Latin American historian William French work on the history of love and courtship in Mexico from 1860 to 1930, or Vanessa Agnew's 2007 study of the emphasis of affect in televised historical re-enactments. In reviewing Agnew's work, Adam Gutteridge of the University of York's Institute for the Public Understanding of the Past aptly summarizes, 'history in general has taken an 'affective turn,' away from the postwar-era's concerns with events, structures, and processes and towards conjecture, emotion, daily life, individual experience, and the elision of temporal distance.' Deeper insights into the complexity of people's experiences come through in everyday moments – or in the case of studies of extraordinary

CASE STUDY: SEAFORD

As an example, I will briefly examine the presence of affect in archived and published materials pertaining to one historic case study. For my PhD dissertation, I am working to show how different interpretations of recurrent, spontaneous anomalous sounds and object movements were made after the Second World War in Britain, the U.S. and Canada. Among the most important case studies was the Seaford, New York, poltergeist case in 1958 that was investigated by J. Gaither Pratt and William G. Roll of J.B. Rhine's Parapsychology Laboratory. This is a rich collection of materials held at Duke University that includes approximately 2,000 pages worth of documentation, much of which is the public's response to the publicity surrounding these events, primarily from press coverage and a televised re-enactment. This aspect of the collection is a rare treasure trove of external perspectives on a single case study. What makes this case so significant to my study is that from it the concept of 'recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis' (RSPK) became a mainstream concept that redefined the potential mechanisms of the poltergeist. I presented this case study at the fourth Exploring the Extraordinary conference in September 2012 as a way to show the challenges of historically reconstructing even a well-documented poltergeist case study in my historical research. To what extent can affective experience be found in it? (continued p. 43)

things, not-so-everyday moments. Prone to desensitizing situations in order to apply specific practices, theories and hypotheses, scholars, scientists and investigators alike have, perhaps inadvertently, often put aside the emotional, impactful meanings that extraordinary experiences have for those who have directly experienced them. I say it's time to let the experients speak for themselves as part of data collection. Experiences, in the unedited words of the experients,

should be better documented in investigations as part of the assessment of case studies – not only to deepen the investigative analysis at that moment, but for the benefit of present colleagues and future studies that might bring forth valuable insights.

The affective turn is making its way into new ways of evaluating and sharing extraordinary experiences themselves. During my recent research trip to North Carolina, I was presented with a variety of studies that demonstrated that affect is gaining importance within parapsychological studies. Notable at 2012's Parapsychological Association convention were reports and workshops on psi experience-sharing groups that range from possibilities in humanistic or transpersonal group therapy conducted by parapsychologists (Alejandro Parra and Juan Carlos Argibay) to community-based endeavours that began at the Rhine Research Center in the 1990s under the guidance of James Carpenter, Sally Rhine Feather, Jerry Solfvin, and Colleen Rae (presented by group moderators Athena A. Drewes and Pamela St. John). These latter groups have evolved into a format that honours experiencers' own interpretations of what they experienced over a strictly parapsychological analysis. St. John, like another experienced-based collective, the Hearing Voices Network, actively promotes the depathologization of such experiences (St. John 2012). Further examples could be provided (and I would very much like to know more about any effort to share and document extraordinary experiences). Such experience-based approaches have expanded a paper I have been working on how psychical researchers and parapsychologists have historically addressed mental health issues and distress among those who claim to have experienced something paranormal. These approaches show scholars and investigators that emotions in the context of extraordinary experiences are ignored at the peril of missing out on how meaning is made of them by experiencers – personal meanings that, indeed, can transform their lives in any given way, productive or destructive. Examining affective experiences also prompts the scholar and investigator to become

Published documentation can be divided into parapsychological studies (including a 46-page incident-by-incident review of the case published by Pratt and Roll in the *Journal of Parapsychology*, preceded by a damning analysis of the case in the Parapsychology Foundation's newsletter), wide media coverage in a variety of newspapers and magazines (including the *New York Times*, *Life* magazine, *Time* magazine, and *Reader's Digest*), and a television re-enactment, 'The House of Flying Objects,' with interviews with witnesses and investigators that aired on CBS's *Armstrong Circle Theater*, the draft and final scripts for which are archived in the Parapsychology Lab fonds. Subsequently, Roll published further articles and chapters on the case study for the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, in his book *The Poltergeist*, and co-authored with Michael Persinger in James Houran and Rense Lange's edited volume, *Hauntings & Poltergeists: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. Secondary accounts of the case appeared in a variety of books by Brad Steiger, D. Scott Rogo, Alan Gauld and Tony Cornell, John and Anne Spencer, as well as *Time-Life's* series *Mysteries of the Unknown* in the volume *Mind Over Matter*. Most recently, the writer Stacy Horn detailed the case study in her book *Unbelievable* that looks at the work of J.B. Rhine and his Parapsychology Lab at Duke University (2009). This is among the best-known, oft-discussed poltergeist cases out there.

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more self-reflexive in their methodologies; their approaches have an impact on social perceptions of extraordinary experiences and on the experiencers themselves.

The 'new economy of emotions' is gaining substantial steam. It can be explored more easily in some disciplines that already give primacy to direct experience compared to historical studies, which relies so much on archived documentary evidence that is often detached from the emo-

tions that are a vital part of experients' encounters with extraordinary things. Here, I'd like to introduce some issues specific to historians as a way to seek insights from you, my interdisciplinary colleagues, on ways to transcend limitations encountered in archival research and oral history collection. This is an opportunity to strengthen methodologies in collecting and assessing direct experiences. As a whole, the intent of examining the role of affect in direct experience is to open new possibilities in scholarly and field studies alike. Documenting and considering experients' emotional responses is also among the most beneficial investigative strategies for those studying or investigating paranormal claims firsthand, and I would value input on that aspect as well.

Seeking Direct Experience Through Historical Approaches

The way in which affect is recorded in investigations of direct experiences differs according to the types of phenomena encountered. At the Society for Psychical Research conference in September 2012, I introduced how psychical researchers addressed 'delusions and distress' among experients. Long-standing ESP researcher Donald West pointed out how the substance of case studies vary depending on the phenomena itself – whether it be classified as subjective (for example, mediumistic or extra-sensory experiences) or objective (such as the physical phenomena witnessed in poltergeist cases that I am currently studying). As such, emotions themselves may be revealed in different degrees depending on the types of cases and the investigative approaches taken to them. I seek further input on this from scholars who study more subjective phenomena, such as mediumship, extra-sensory perception and others forms of altered states of consciousness in which affect is more integrated into documentation of the experiences. For now, I will focus on the case studies around which it is perhaps more challenging to unearth the emotional responses of experients – those involving physical phenomena.

Disappointingly, the archives at Duke University lack direct testimony from the Herrmann family who were impacted by this anomalous phenomenon in February and March 1958, as well as investigative notes by Pratt. Investigative notes were not found in his archived files that are currently being organized at the University of West Georgia. The reports made by Roll, Pratt, and the police detective Joseph Tozzi are generally dispassionate. Yet moments of affect emerge. For example, at one point when Tozzi was downstairs with the Herrmann's son, James, an ornamental metal horse flew and struck the floor by the detective's feet – with no one to blame. As an investigative tactic aimed to get a confession of fraud from the son, Tozzi accused James, 'saying he had seen him throw the horse, which he had not, and subjected him to a severe grilling, with the boy denying he had anything to do with this or the other incidents.' James's father also accused the boy, 'claiming the detective had proof he had caused many of the incidents and that it was time to confess. The father said that the boy, driven to tears, only said, 'Dad, I had nothing to do with any of it' (Roll & Persinger, 127). This investigative tactic was designed to address suspicions that the boy was responsible for the moving objects, but it also indicates intense emotions within the household. Indicates is the key word here as there are few other avenues in the documentation through which the affective experiences of the family are addressed.

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Archival collections of documents usually offer incomplete slices and clues; at their best, they include direct testimony that attests to the affective experience, the very emotional process of making meaning from what has happened. Recorded and transcribed interviews, personal journals, and detailed correspondence can provide gateways into these experiences from various perspectives. The problem is that such documents involving experients, when they are

found, diverge dramatically in quality and detail.

Some historians benefit from being able to conduct oral histories with individuals who directly experienced extraordinary things. In my own doctoral study-in-progress of the poltergeist phenomenon spanning from after the Second World War to recent times, interactions with living sources have been tremendously advantageous. There are so many insights to be gained – both in recollection and retrospection – of past events from those who experienced them. Oral history collection presents a variety of challenges as well, which I will touch upon further below. But the majority of historians are working on projects in which their historical actors are long deceased, and thus their reliance on published works and archival materials is paramount. In addressing some of the issues historians confront in archives and oral history collection, I hope to generate a lively, ongoing interdisciplinary discussion that has the potential to enhance not only historical studies but any scholar or investigator's abilities to consider and analyse emotional responses, the personal meanings derived from them, and the process of negotiation and debate that ultimately influences interpretations and the making of knowledge.

In my own exploration of hundreds of archival documents on poltergeist cases, I am often left with an absence or only minute details of direct experience. Archived correspondence from experiencers, usually brief and to the point, gets at what is happening, but often only offers small hints of their emotional response. In many archival files, experiencers' own words are missing altogether; the psychical researcher or parapsychologist responded to a telephone call or a personal visit, and the only documentation filed is limited to investigative notes or a report. In other cases, investigators or their families have edited documentary collections before submitting them to an archive, leaving out materials deemed to be too sensitive or irrelevant that revealed moments that, for scholars, colleagues, and other experiencers alike, would provide significant clues as to how investigators' interac-

Stacy Horn is particularly adept at excavating emotional moments in her analysis of the case study in *Unbelievable*. She writes of Pratt's concern that 'presence of so many strangers in the house completely changed the psychological atmosphere,' no doubt connected to the moods of the family during the series of events (Horn, 138). The father's responses in the press further emphasize the emotional stresses the family endured as a result of the parapsychological investigation itself. After participating in psychological tests, Mr. Herrmann flatly refused Pratt and Roll's requests that James take a polygraph test, showing how offended he was that they would suggest his son take a test designed for criminals (Horn, 148-49). In further interviews with the press, Mr. Herrmann remained in defensive mode, critical of the investigative procedures. Horn also looked at correspondence between the Rhine family that demonstrated that emotional tensions surrounding this case were high in the Parapsychology Lab; Louisa Rhine's correspondence with daughter Sally showed that there were 'unexpected fireworks' among staff members when J. B. decided that investigation of the Seaford case would close despite ongoing interest in the case. She wrote, 'one member of the staff exploded and I sensed the rest were with her.' J. B. Rhine stood behind his experimental parapsychology mandate, and to him the Seaford case was not contributing to that, so their study into it ceased (Horn, 154-55). These are but small indications of affect within the Seaford case that hint at a larger affective process that impacted not only the family, the most direct experiencers, but also investigators.

Horn also managed to conduct an interview with a surviving family member, the Herrmann's daughter Lucille, now a retired schoolteacher. Her brother James, considered to be at the centre of events in the household, 'doesn't like to talk about the events of 1958,' Horn wrote, and thus did not participate – in itself a problem that those wishing to conduct interviews with experiencers (continued p. 46)

tions with eyewitnesses unfolded, of the emo-

tional reactions that guided the process of negotiating the meaning of the events.

Why are affective experiences so crucial to the historical study of extraordinary things? First and foremost, the direct experience is primary – it is the single event or series of events from which the eyewitness or eyewitnesses move from the ordinary to something extraordinary. What happens is so demarcated from day-to-day life that it evokes emotional response, pause, consideration, and at times even a significant shift in worldview that is often not evident in psychical research case studies (because there is little to no follow up with witnesses over time). In some cases, extraordinary experiences resonate for experiencers in a way that sometimes can be successfully conveyed to others (for example, how Marian apparitions can inspire large numbers of Catholics). It is more common that the encounter with something extraordinary leaves the experiencer feeling like an outsider, whatever emotional response they have to their experience, and it is difficult for them to convey their experience to non-experiencers. It is this type of alienation among experiencers that has inspired projects of depathologization and normalization among psi experience sharing groups; it has also prompted psychical researchers and parapsychologists to share similar anomalous encounters with experiencers to give them a sense that they are not alone in what they experienced, a form of consoling.

Experiencers' personal narratives, inclusive of emotional responses, also resonate strongly with the wider public. It gives people a reason to care about extraordinary things and the study of them. By taking in account direct affective experience enables scholars, scientists, and investigators alike to engage with wider audiences, to operate more publicly rather than in isolation, to broaden the scope of conversation and dialogue on this topic. I can only imagine considering of affective experiences making for better studies, although there certainly are challenges and pitfalls in communicating ideas publicly, for example when the press – and increasingly the viral nature of (mis)information dissemination online

commonly encounter when the experiencer prefers not to reflect on past incidents or feels exhausted from the attention they had already received. Horn's interview with Lucille enabled both recollection and retrospection in these events. Lucille remained adamant that she and her brother were not responsible for the anomalous movement of objects and sounds in the house. In her recollection, she added physical details about the phenomena that were absent in the parapsychologists' reports. Lucille recalled how she and her brother saw Detective Tozzi as someone who protected them, who was sympathetic and kind. Again, an affective relationship surfaces through oral history collection that may otherwise be unknown in archival documentation (Horn, 153-54).

Overall, I would say that the affective experience is weakly relayed through the available documentation on the Seaford case. Other archived case studies that I have come across have far better evidence of affective experience through recorded and transcribed interviews, thorough investigative notes that include emotional responses of experiencers, written and signed eyewitness statements, and even personal diary extracts. At this moment, I have collected these materials and the task ahead of me is to analyse them for my dissertation.

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– get hold of a study and so much becomes lost in translation. Once information gets out there, it reshapes itself in ways that are beyond the control of experiencers and investigators alike. This is an issue to consider in another discussion.

Recollection and Retrospection

Historians of recent times (for example who write about events since 1950) have a significant advantage over their colleagues who study earlier periods in that they may interview living individuals who can speak directly about their own experiences. This empowers the experiencers in studies on things that happened to them. As historian Judith Moyer points out, oral history

collection has democratized history itself – giving voice to those who otherwise were left out of the documented past. Technology has improved the historians quest to conduct oral histories: inexpensive recording equipment (you can now record audio on many types of handheld devices, including many mobile phones, and high-quality video cameras are common features even on low-priced digital cameras); cheap communications (one can phone or conduct Internet-based calls to any part of the world at a low cost via phone plans or using computer software); and the instant and easy process of e-mailing enables one to conduct a thoughtful, written dialogue with experiants.

Yet even when historical actors are still alive, there are issues pertaining to memory and recollection of events. Historical actors may be advanced in age, thus their memory may not be as sharp. There are issues to consider with those who have good memories of events. But Moyer argues that issues of accuracy are just as prevalent in written documents; ideological slants, fragmented evidence, and the problems of conveying direct experience into written or spoken recollection persist in archived and published documentation as they do in oral recollections. All the same, oral histories carry with them tremendous advantages. I would say the best way to conduct and document them would be on video. You get the full range of human expression in an interview that enables review to the emotional responses that happen during the process of interviewing. With tact and empathy, an interview can delve into the affective experiences that demonstrate the ways in knowledge of the experiences was made, as well as what the experience meant to the individual, both at the time and retrospectively. These skills can be cultivated with practice, and there are plenty of books, courses, and websites that help an investigator develop interviewing abilities. Still, most historians depend on the archive. They do not have the luxury of being able to interview their historical actors. There is an ongoing debate among historians about reading between the lines or against the grain to better understand what happened in the past – another discussion

Furthermore, I have started to conduct interviews with experiants who have contacted me through an online call for those who have encounter objects moving on their own with no apparent explanation which is starting to yield more information about the affective aspects of their experiences. The affective experience is but one part of looking at shifting attitudes toward the poltergeist phenomenon after the Second World War, but it is a key part that I hope will contribute not only a deeper knowledge of the study's past, but that will enable better investigative practices of the phenomenon in the present.

altogether. Historians each find their own methodologies to speak with the dead.

The (Re)construction of Affect

Historical interpretation is an imperfect exercise. Among many insightful approaches, the quest for affective experience is an increasingly important tool that demonstrates the complexity of historic events, how they meant different things to different people, and how like so many of the anomalous events themselves, there is no clear resolution but rather a whole variety of possibilities to consider. Historians are bringing affect to the table because they want to bring to these experiences to life and demonstrate the negotiations that result in dominant interpretations of what happened. We, as investigators, are emotional beings as well. Emily Robinson in her 2010 article in the journal *Rethinking History*, 'Touching the void: Affective history and the impossible,' asks historians to self-reflexively consider the 'epistemic consequences of feeling oneself to be in direct, *physical* contact with 'the past' [in archives] at the same time as being unavoidably aware of its absence.' Unless there is a Tardis available, historians remain immovably situated in their present time. Historians channel the material archive, the primary source materials, and the opportunity to actually interview historical actors – and all of these experiences affect the scholar, they create a variety of emotional sensations. This is something that

should be considered part of the study of affect and the writing of history, not separate from it. Robinson quotes Alan Munslow, who writes that 'while most historians know they construct the past, they really want it to be a reconstruction' (Robinson, 504). Here is the desire I felt when, for example, looking at the Seaford case. Even with all of the existing documentation, are there ways to *reconstruct* what happened, to take myself back to the space, people and events, drawing forth affective experiences? In my initial analysis, presented at Exploring the Extraordinary, direct experience was nearly absent in the archives, and all I was left with were layers upon layers of *construction*. Even my own attempt to *reconstruct* the case by building a physical maquette of the Seaford house based on floorplans that included descriptions of the movement of objects in relation to where people were located left me with little more than blank walls and a collection of photographic images taken by the press – in themselves reconstructions, depictions that are far outside of the direct experience. The artful photos in *Life* magazine, for example, are hazy, dreamlike, and staged. The family are simply a cast of characters in a story. *Life* constructed its own play of the events, as did CBS's *Armstrong Circle Theater*, Pratt and Roll's parapsychological reports, and Horn's chapter in *Unbelievable*. The Herrmann family's own words and experiences only relayed through secondary sources. The direct affective experience is largely absent.

I want to touch upon one more question here before making a concluding statement of affect can be implemented in present-day investigations. I don't have an answer to this question, but I wish to pose it and the issues surrounding it for further discussion. To what extent can we analyse and compare affect across different case studies? For the historian, comparing change and continuity through a selection of events across time and space has been central to the study. My concern in doing a broader analysis of a wide cross-section of case studies is that it is difficult and potentially unfair to reduce individual's affective experiences across a spectrum of individuals from different places, time

periods, and circumstances. Yes, in a comparative analysis, it is possible to draw similarities in emotional responses, but at what cost? I feel prime attention should be given to individual experiences and what they personally meant to experiencers. There are ongoing debates about reductionism in scholarly studies. It is a tool that enables understanding of broader issues, but it also wipes out details that do not necessarily fit well with the overarching conclusions made. It is something that I am particularly conscious and cautious about. This is a riddle with which I will be confronted as I continue to work on my dissertation project – and all future projects for that matter.

I conclude with some productive possibilities for investigations of present-day extraordinary things: paying careful attention the affective experiences of those who directly encounter extraordinary things carries many benefits. For one, it provides avenues to recognize and respect what the experience means to the experiencer. How has this anomalous event impacted the experiencer's life, and how does that relate to the wider spectrum of theories out there along with the theories and questions of special interest to the investigator? In short, how do experiencers relate to their own experience? Emotional clues are crucial to answering that question. It's tricky. Everyone expresses emotion to varying degrees, but the very way in which the experiencer conveys their experience is of particular value in the analysis. To what extent are they emotionally invested in the experience? Why the experiencer cares about the anomalous experience helps the investigator self-reflexively examine what's at stake in the experiences of extraordinary things, and how they are actually inserting themselves into the events and the analysis of them. If examining affect is part of the investigative process, including recording and documenting experiences in the words of the experiencer (in which reconstruction already overrides direct experience), this will be a productive addition to the data included in case studies, something very useful to colleagues and future researchers who will wish to review the case to further examine the larger extraordinary phenomena be-

ing studied. Implementing this today would potentially be a transformative contribution to current and future studies that carries benefits such as better investigative practices, empathetic approaches working with experiencers, and the ability for the events to be more accurately recreated for the wider public.

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Christopher Laursen is a Canadian PhD candidate in the Department of History at the University of British Columbia. His dissertation-in-progress examines shifting explanations of the poltergeist phenomenon in the mid- to late twentieth century between the

spiritual and the psychological. A former journalist and broadcaster, he holds an MA in History from the University of Guelph and a BA from Carleton University in Ottawa. In addition to his scholarly studies, he explores anomalous experiences through a series of articles, *Extraordinarium*, which he regularly publishes on his research website, <http://christopherlaursen.com>

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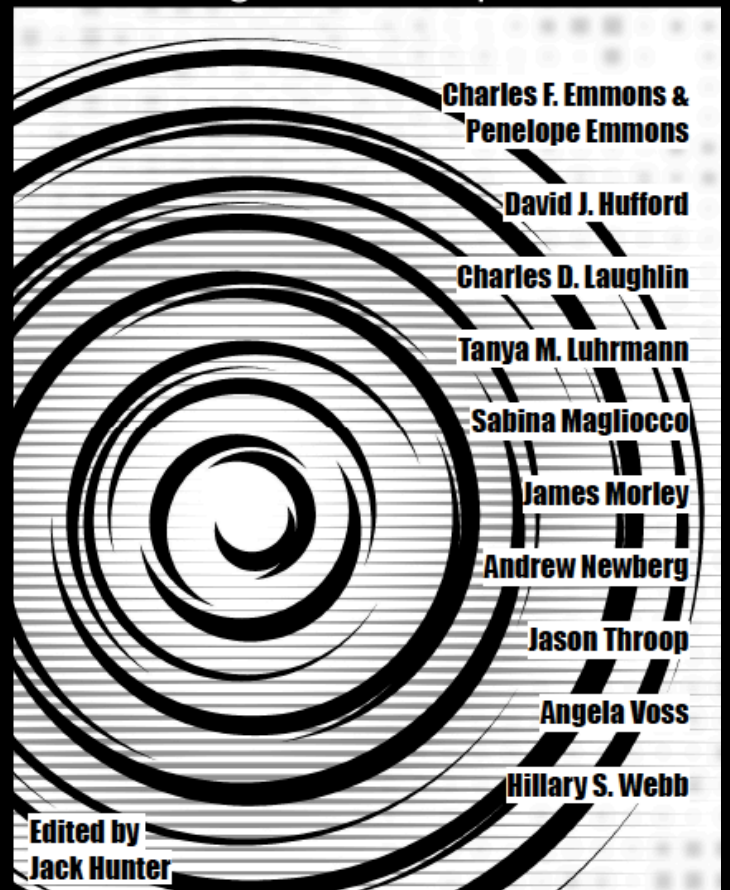
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Fireflies and Shooting Stars: Visual Narratives of Daimonic Intelligence

Angela Voss

Man, in his inability to grasp the divine, requires the gods to be revealed in a palpable form, and this requirement is met, at the gods' behest, in the form of light or fire.¹

Paranormal events happen. In general conversation about such things, most of us have an anecdote about an experience which has no rational explanation, and which everyone recognises as arising from an underground of '(un)common sense,' a counter-cultural stratum whose mysterious *modus operandi* has no place in the knowledge-systems which inform our education and day-to-day lives. As Gregory Shaw has observed, 'we live in a profound disconnect between private experience and public discourse.'² He recommends that researchers and academics can begin to heal this disconnect by 'intelligently exploring' the hidden dimensions of existence, thus building bridges between the anecdotal event involving sensory, lived experience and the theories that inform our understanding and explanation of such events. This is also my intention in devoting this essay to the examination of one particular kind of non-rational phenomenon—that of anomalous moving lights, and their identification with non-material intelligent beings or daimons.³ I shall address this theme primarily from the viewpoint of neoplatonic metaphysics, because here we find a metaphorical scheme which encompasses a multi-layered vision of epistemological possibilities within a coherent whole, and it is my suggestion that such a model can help us elucidate the claims and contentions of both contemporary psychics and their sceptical opponents.

I want to focus primarily on the questions of ontology and perception: how can we begin to

evaluate the 'truth' of these apparitions in terms of their apparent objectivity, and what mode of vision is required for humans to 'see' them accurately enough to gain some deeper insight into their provenance and purpose (as opposed to analysing their visible form alone)? Often a purely material explanation is pitted against a naive assumption of other-worldly agency, without acknowledging that there may be another way of looking altogether. I would suggest that empirical methods of evaluation are inadequate for assessing the liminal nature of these light manifestations—for despite the fact that many claim that they can be captured for all to see on video or digital photographs,⁴ it does not follow that they *originate* from the earthly dimension or that sense-perception and material science are adequate tools for fathoming their extra-ordinary, numinous, and often seemingly intelligent activity. We live in an age where the bottom line of 'truth' is the rational explanation in terms of physical and material causation, even if that explanation pushes credulity to its limits.⁵ But neither should we buy in to the equally unsophisticated identification of strange lights as UFOs, or aliens as objectively 'real' visitors from an objectively 'real' outer space. In both scientific and science-fiction paradigms, there is an in-built assumption that such a 'reality' has an external, verifiable existence independent from the observer's own visionary frequency (as it were). This literal approach denies the supremely important idea, long recognised in traditions of esoteric wisdom, that there are echelons of deepening modes of perception available to humans which far exceed the limits of either sense perception or critical reasoning, and which move towards a closing of the subjective-objective epistemological divide. It also denies a sense of the *sacred* as an epistemological category with its own distinct modes of expression—always understood as gateways to

higher (or deeper) consciousness—modes which have now come to be regarded as inferior and unreliable in relation to rationality, i.e. ‘merely subjective,’ in a radical ‘ontological inversion’ of cognitive value.⁶ I am referring to the intellectual intuition (in neoplatonic terminology) and the creative imagination which conveys it through form and image, engaging the knower in a symbolic mode of understanding which is *participatory* in that it reveals something about the nature of his or her own soul, and opens into realms which the critical reason can only characterise as paradoxical, para-normal or downright impossible.⁷

To begin, let us explore the connections between visible and invisible worlds through daimonic epiphanies, luminous soul-vehicles and the divine imagination. Daimonic or spiritual intelligences have long been associated with the stars as points of spherical light, as well as with invisible spirit or soul-bodies which manifest in the form of such light. One of the earliest suggestions that stars embody divine spirits is found in Hesiod (active 750-650 BCE):

To Kephalos [Eos] bore a brilliant son,
Strong Phaeton, a man much like the gods.
When he was young and had the fragile bloom
Of glorious youth, and tender, childish mind,
The laughter-loving Aphrodite seized
And took him to her shrine and made him serve
As temple-keeper, bright divinity (Daimon dios) [i.e. a star].⁸

Phaeton, a child of immortal mother and mortal father, becomes a *daimon* or disembodied spirit, the immaterial essence of the visible star Jupiter.⁹ By the time of Plato (424-348 BCE) we find the notion that all human souls are sown into the stars before they become incarnated into bodily existence, and to their stars they will return at death.¹⁰ In attributing each soul to a star,

Plato introduces the idea of the soul’s vehicle, its astral body, which accompanies it in its descent into matter. In this subtle body the soul is ‘systematically moulded, framed and controlled by the spheres of light called the wanderers or the planetary gods.’¹¹ We must remember that for Plato there are supra-sensory realities behind and within physical phenomena, the *eide* or ‘patterns fixed in the nature of things’ which participate in the eternal forms through sympathetic resonance because they are made in their image.¹² These patterns then act as mediators between the divine intellect and human senses, and are given visible or audible form as universal or cultural-specific archetypal images. The sphere is the most perfect of these *eide*, being reflected poetically in the perceived shape of the cosmos itself, and the planetary motions within it. This is why for Plato, the very beginnings of philosophy occur in the contemplation of the perfection of the visible heavens, as the soul seeks to become aligned with its proportions and awake to its own former sphericity, so that it may rotate in harmony with the world soul.¹³

At this point I should remind the reader that when evoking the ‘reality’ of a dimension beyond the sensory, esoteric philosophy speaks in a metaphoric voice, recognising that the ability to grasp the meaning of a poetic or symbolic image is an essential process in the soul’s cognitive journey beyond discursive thinking.¹⁴ This is not easy to capture in an academic discourse, but perhaps it can be done through a kind of hybrid writing which continually refers the objective or outer form of the event to both an inner sense of its noetic significance and its lived reality, or as McGilchrist would put it, to the ‘bigger picture’ facilitated by right brain hemisphere understanding.¹⁵ The French historian of religion Henry Corbin’s articulation of the *mundus imaginalis* as an ‘inter-world’ corresponding to and entered into by the creative imagination as a faculty of perception, forming a bridge between material and spiritual modes of knowledge is relevant here, as it provides a context for the reality of non-physical phenomena which neither reduces them to the status of material substance (such as tables and chairs) nor ele-

vates them to transcendent principles beyond the direct experience of human beings. This medial world is 'A world as ontologically real as the world of the senses and the world of the intellect, a world that requires a faculty of perception belonging to it, a faculty that is a cognitive function, a *noetic* value, as fully real as the faculties of sensory perception or intellectual intuition. This faculty is the imaginative power.'¹⁶

Corbin was writing from within the framework of Sufism, which derived the recognition of the imagination as *cognitive* from the later neoplatonists, and it was they who connected it directly to the 'subtle body' and daimonic activity.¹⁷ Synesius (365-c.430 CE) in his treatise *De insomniis* suggests that it is the *pneuma* or etheric body which 'brings the imagination into play' as a kind of 'common sense' which is of a higher order of cognition than sense-perception.¹⁸ This *phantastikon pneuma* must be kept pure through ritual activity, as it comprises the 'borderland between reason and unreason, between body and the bodiless [...] by its means things divine are joined with lowest things.' He adds that 'therefore it is difficult for its nature to be comprehended by philosophy,'¹⁹ if by 'philosophy' is meant rational enquiry alone. Intimations again of Corbin's *mundus imaginalis* as an order of reality where spiritual essence takes on visual form, entered via altered states of consciousness such as dreams and waking visions.²⁰ Furthermore, Synesius associates this imaginative essence with the daimons, who are 'supplied with their substance by this mode of life.'²¹ They add imagination to human thought, and may even 'take on the appearance of happenings' which implies that they can become visible as events in the world.²² The ultimate destiny of the daimonic soul is to become absorbed into the pure radiant light of the divine realm, but on the way it may assume a variety of coverings or vehicles, from the gross and quasi-material (i.e. misty) to the luminous.²³

The *astroeides* or luminous body seems to be a more direct and purer manifestation of divine essence than the *pneuma*. In Plutarch's (46-120 CE) 'Myth of Timarchus,' a colourful narrative about an after-death journey, Timarchus is

shown a vision of discarnate human souls by a spirit guide. He sees many star-like lights hovering around an abyss, falling into it from above, and shooting up into it from below. His guide confirms that these are 'the daimons themselves,' and tells him:

In the stars that are apparently extinguished [...] you see the souls that sink entirely into the body; in the stars that are lighted again [...] you see the souls that float back from the body after death, shaking off a sort of dimness and darkness as one might shake off mud; while the stars that move about on high are the daemons of men said to 'possess understanding' [...] hearing this, [Timarchus] attended more carefully and saw that the stars bobbed about, some more, some less, like the corks we observe riding on the sea to mark nets.²⁴

For Plutarch then, the highest part of the soul, the intuitive understanding, does not mingle with the body but is 'like a buoy attached to the top, floating on the surface in contact with the man's head, while he is as it were submerged in the depths.' However, raising the problematic question of whether this daimonic intelligence is 'inside' or 'outside' the soul, Plutarch says that those 'who take it to be within themselves, as they take reflected objects to be in the mirrors that reflect them' are mistaken, but that those 'who conceive the matter rightly call it a daimon, as being external.'²⁵

Plato had in fact raised this very question of the ambiguous ontological status of the daimon, and Plutarch would have found his source for daimon-as-intelligence in the *nous-daimon* of the *Timaeus* (90 a-c): 'God gave the sovereign part of the human soul to be the divinity of each one, being that part which, as we say, dwells at the top of the body, and inasmuch as we are a plant not of an earthly but of a heavenly growth, raises us from earth to our kindred who are in heaven.' But in the *Phaedo* (107d) and the *Laws* (713c-d) the daimon is seen more as a separate entity or guide to the afterlife, a superior being or guardian spirit. Socrates' daimon can be seen

to have elements of both, manifesting as a voice which is both 'other' and yet also as his own moral nature.²⁶ The author of the Platonic *Epinomis* characterises the daimons as 'external' elemental creatures, visible because they mainly partake of fire, although they also contain varying portions of earth, air and water. These daimons, he says, are 'the divine host of the stars.'²⁷ We find the same image used by Plotinus (204/5-270 CE), who likens the daimons' relationship to the gods to 'the radiance around every star.'²⁸ He also takes up Plato's theme of the duality of the daimonic; on the one hand he refers to celestial daimonic intelligences which straddle the divine and human realms: 'we say that they are eternal next after the gods, but already inclining towards us, between the gods and our race.'²⁹ Yet on the other, he asks 'are they the trace left by each soul when it enters the universe?'³⁰ suggesting that they comprise the intellect, the highest part of the soul, that which remains undescended from its divine origin. In *Enneads* III 'on the tutelary daimon' he explains:

One must think that there is a universe in our soul, not only an intelligible one but an arrangement like in form to that of the soul of the world: so, as that too, is distributed according to its diverse powers into the sphere of the fixed stars and those of the moving stars, the powers in our soul also are of like form to these powers, and there is an activity proceeding from each power, and when the souls are set free they come there to the star which is in harmony with their character and power which lived and worked in them; and each will have a god of this kind as a guardian spirit, either the star itself or the god set above this power.³¹

The soul's daimonic powers are then analogous to the powers in the cosmos, yet they also have an aspect which is experienced as 'other,' a guardian principle which helps us to fulfil our destiny. Damascius (458-c.538 CE) describes the stellar power of the soul as 'a certain radiant vehicle, star-like and eternal [which is] securely shut away in this gross body.'³² This light-filled

body, in the theurgic rituals of later Platonists, becomes the means by which the soul may ascend to the god and achieve deification.³³ Iamblichus (250-325 CE) preferred to think of the daimon as partaking of a superior order to the human soul, beyond the intellect, whose powers are invoked during theurgic ritual.³⁴

For Iamblichus, as for Synesius, the power of affective concentration is required to harness the soul's fiery vehicle and reform its spherical integrity, for it becomes ever more material as it descends into the body and this process must be reversed.³⁵ The question of how an individual's desire or focussed attention may provide psychic energy for spiritual epiphanies is hardly discussed today, and yet it was central to the Platonic theory of *eros* as a magical, connective power, harnessed through the 'intention of the imagination' as Ficino would put it.³⁶ Iamblichus associates the soul's eternal aetheric vehicle (the *ochema*) with the *phantasia*, and remarks that it is prayer which facilitates the alignment of the soul with its higher or divine nature: 'our *ochema* is made spherical and is moved circularly whenever the soul is especially assimilated to *nous*.'³⁷ It then becomes like the subtle body of the god, which 'is utterly liberated from any centripetal or centrifugal tendency because it has neither tendency or because it is moved in a circle.'³⁸ During the theurgic ritual of *photogogia*, the soul's subtle body became illuminated and revealed the presence of the god via the imagination: '*Photogogia* somehow illuminates with divine light the aethereal and luminous vehicle of the soul, from which divine vision, set in motion by the gods, take possession of our imaginative power' says Iamblichus.³⁹ This can happen either through the presence of the gods in the soul, or through the shining of a light onto the soul, again raising the question of the internal or external provenance of daimonic energy.⁴⁰

What kind of lights are manifested to human sight in these rituals? Iamblichus gives us a detailed taxonomy of spirit-beings, their hierarchies extending up from human souls through material and sublunary archons, heroes and daimons, to angels, archangels and gods.⁴¹ Each will be accompanied by a light whose intensity

is mediated by their degree of materiality;⁴² thus gods' lights are unchanging, 'flashing forth with an indivisible and inexpressible fire.' Archangels are similar to gods, being 'full of supernatural light'; angels have a more 'divided' light, whereas daimons 'appear to the view at different times in different forms, the same forms appearing great and small.' They 'glow with smouldering fire' which can be 'expressed in speech,' and which 'does not exceed the power of vision of those who are capable of viewing superior beings.' The Heroes' light is apparently similar to the daimonic, whereas the cosmic archons produce a pure fire and the material ones a murkier light. Human souls appear as 'fitfully visible' as they are heavily soiled by the 'realm of generation.' Now we should pay attention to Iamblichus' assertion that such lights are visible only to those who have developed the degree of imaginal vision which conforms to them. For as these subtle light bodies do not mingle or participate in matter, they are not 'seen' in the same way as living bodies.⁴³ However, their light may be conducted in ritual activity through sunlight, moonlight, air or aether, symbolic objects and incantations, water, or on a wall prepared by sacred inscriptions. In such instances, Iamblichus describes the light as 'from without,' serving the will and intelligence of the gods.⁴⁴ Yet it is clear that it is also the soul's imaginative faculty which *perceives* the light as a supernatural energy, although it can also observe it 'as if' it is an objective phenomenon—the corollary being that sense-perception alone would simply see light with no understanding of its provenance. This epistemological subtlety is explained more clearly by Proclus (412-485 CE), who points out that:

the gods themselves are incorporeal, but since those who see them possess bodies, the visions which issue from the gods to worthy recipients possess a certain quality from the gods who send them but also have something connatural with those who see them. *This is why the gods are seen yet not seen at all.* In fact, those who see the gods witness them in the luminous gar-

ments of their souls. The point is, they are often seen when the eyes are shut.⁴⁵ (*my italics*)

I would agree with Proclus that this *is* exactly the point. To assume a 'bottom line' of objective, sense-perceptible truth about anomalous lights means that any further directly intuitive or imaginative interpretation is rendered 'untrue' or fanciful, whereas from the neoplatonic perspective, such an assumption is the result of limited perceptual capacity, unable (or unwilling) to 'tune in' to a more subtle visionary potential. As Leonard George has elegantly put it, 'the truth sought beyond extension and shape hides within the extended and shaped geometric objects of imagination.'⁴⁶ The question becomes, as Shaw observes, not *what* one sees, but *how* one sees, for the presence of the gods 'reveals the incorporeal as corporeal to the eyes of the soul by means of the eyes of the body.'⁴⁷

So where do our excursions into neoplatonic daemonology lead us? I would argue that there are profound implications here for our understanding of paranormal visions, through recognising that imaginal and sensory modes of perception are not mutually exclusive but simply different registers along a spectrum of frequencies. Indeed it is possible that what one person perceives via their purified *ochema* will remain invisible to another whose imagination is not so finely tuned, so it is rarely a clear-cut case of reality or illusion.

Moving now to the Renaissance revival of neoplatonic metaphysics and magic, we find the Florentine magus Marsilio Ficino (1433-99) incorporating elements of both contemplative and theurgic neoplatonism in his understanding of the daimonic element in humans and the cosmos. In Ficino's Christian Platonism, the good daimons become God's messengers and guides, helping us 'by means of prophetic signs, omens, dreams, oracles, voices, sacrifices and divine inspiration.'⁴⁸ As Michael Allen has remarked, Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Apology* contains his most detailed analysis of daimonic activity,⁴⁹ although we also find considerable speculation on their nature in his commentaries on Plotinus

and in his treatise on astral magic, *De vita coelitus comparanda*. In the first of these texts, Ficino posits three kinds of spiritual intelligence: elemental daimons, celestial spirits within the cosmos (i.e. planetary deities), and supercelestial spirits or angels. Both the latter he says are called gods by the 'ancient theologians.'⁵⁰ The daimons are subject to the planetary gods and dwell in the elementary spheres, mediating the planetary gifts to the human soul in Ficino's system of natural magic.⁵¹ The first two categories are visible, the last invisible, and both here and in his commentary on Plotinus' *Ennead* III, Ficino assigns the daimons primarily to the element of air, whereas pure fire is more characteristic of gods. The daimons of the upper, fiery air preside over contemplation of sublime things, the daimons of pure air preside over reason and the active life, and the daimons of watery air preside over the sensual and vegetative powers of nature.⁵² Each of these then also corresponds with a human cognitive faculty: fiery air with the intellect or intuitive understanding, pure air with reason and smoky or vapour-laden air with imagination and sense-perception—and it will be through these corresponding modes that they will be perceived:

If we live according to the imagination, our outer daimon is an airy one: it is a daimon which belongs to the lower region of the air and which, by acting on our imagination, forcefully propels our soul by means of its own imagining. If, however, we live according to reason, our outer daimon which belongs to the middle region of the air, drives human reason with its own reasoning. Finally, if our life is intellectual, a daimon belonging to the highest region of the air assists our intellect by means of its intellectual activity.⁵³

What, then, on the visibility of these entities? Ficino describes them as spherical, moving in circular motion as the 'stars of the sphere of air,' emitting rays which, he says, the magician knows how to make visible in thickened air—air that is which may be filled with the smoke of incense in invocatory rituals.⁵⁴ So yet again we

find the paradoxical yet intrinsic relationship between inner and outer aspects of the daimonic. Although Ficino tends to emphasise the externality of the daimon, suggesting that it communicates by imprinting meaning on the imagination by means of perceptible rays,⁵⁵ he also acknowledges that 'what imagines in us is in some respect a daimon.'⁵⁶ This imagination is powerful enough to imprint images which it receives from noetic sources into the world of the senses, and in the *Platonic Theology* we find a passage which re-iterates Proclus' concern with the dangers of confusing these projected images with those which arise from the material world:

For the most part, the phantasy, which most guides the way we live our life, is so intent that with the sharpest gaze it ponders its own images within itself. These intensely envisioned images blaze out to the common sense, which we call in the Platonic manner the imagination, and beyond to the lower senses and the spirit. But it is common to claim that this image shining back in the senses and in the spirit is a reality. For people who are awake say that they see a man when they turn to the image of a man flickering in their senses. Similarly people who are asleep say that they see a man when an image of him shines out from the phantasy preserving it and passes through the imagination into the sense and the spirit.⁵⁷

There is a difference then between a visual image which is only an outward representation, and an image which maintains an identity with the noetic realm sown deep within the soul, and whose meaning arises from the recognition of this very consubstantiality.⁵⁸ This is precisely why the daimon is simultaneously without and within the psyche. We are talking here of the kind of knowledge aroused by the symbolic or archetypal image, and it is this possibility of a visible entity pointing to a *participatory* (and not merely subjective) meaning through the engagement of the imagination which poses a challenge to empirical or scientific investigations into the paranormal.

For the remainder of this essay, I want to draw some parallels between these pre-modern understandings of daimonic manifestation and contemporary eye-witness accounts of anomalous lights, bearing in mind the arguments I have outlined above for their 'existence' in a very real, but non-quantifiable, ontological field. Firstly, I was struck by the descriptions of disembodied souls in Michael Newton's accounts of his life between lives therapeutic sessions.⁵⁹ In this hypnosis work, individuals are put into deep trance and experience what Newton purports to be the life of their disembodied soul in between particular incarnations. In this liminal place, they observe the following strange entities: 'blobs of energy,'⁶⁰ 'half-formed human shapes,'⁶¹ 'myriads of sharp star lights,'⁶² 'patches of light bobbing around,'⁶³ and 'bunches of moving lights buzzing around as fireflies.'⁶⁴ Remarkably similar to Timarchus' vision of the daimons, and seemingly dependent on the accessing of a level of awareness beyond the conscious mind. Newton however appears somewhat immune to the symbolic significance of what his clients report, preferring a tone of apparent objectivity as if the spirit world can be considered to be of the same ontological status as our own—a problem we encounter in much 'new age' literature.⁶⁵

This becomes even more of an issue when we consider the appearance of strange lights on digital photographs. What appears to be a common image is that of a misty spherical object filled with a 'snake' pattern and with a central nucleus, claimed by many to be a 'spirit orb' which is usually invisible to the naked eye. The scientific explanation for such an anomaly is that 'in digital cameras the distance between the lens and flash has decreased causing a decrease in the angle of light reflection that increases the chance of catching sub-visible particles,'⁶⁶ these particles being dust or moisture. However, psychics and mediums claim that these orbs are genuine signs of spirit energy. One medium explains: 'orbs usually appear as spheres of light, they can appear as tiny flashing pinpoints of light as they move.'⁶⁷ They are often accompanied by mists or smoky wisps and can develop

into full-blown apparitions: 'these mists can sometimes show the actual shape and form of the person manifesting.' The psychic explanation is that light entities result from the expenditure of energy as spiritual or daimonic intelligences attempt to become visible in the physical world. Again, not so different perhaps from Ficino's speculation about the 'airy daimons' making their presence observable in the thickened air of clouds or smoke. Now according to the neoplatonic model, there is no reason why such 'sub-visible particles' should not be *both* the result of a camera fault *and* also the manifestation of imaginal entities made visible to certain states of consciousness in certain conditions, for physical analysis does not cancel out supra-physical domains of enquiry, it simply constitutes one mode of investigation.

One of the most well-documented experiments in psychic communication took place in the Norfolk village of Scole from 1993-8, known as the Scole Experiment.⁶⁸ Here, participants witnessed an extraordinary array of anomalous phenomena, from images imprinted on photographic film to apparitions and moving lights. One witness reports:

Suddenly, the room began to be filled with spirit lights that can be best described in size and appearance as resembling fireflies with constant illumination. At times, these bluish-white lights would hover in front of spectators, and at other times, they would travel across the floor and appear to climb up the table in the centre of the room and fly up through the rafters of the garage [...] a light flew from above the spectators' heads and across from the Scole team and touched the index finger of my right hand. I was incredulous. I could feel the light physically touch me and could plainly see that it was not a fibre-optic cord or light projection, but rather a self-contained sphere of bluish-white light of indeterminate source.⁶⁹

The lights are furthermore described as 'resembling shooting stars,' as darting around at great speed and performing elaborate dances 'includ-

ing perfect, sustained circles executed at high velocity,' entering crystals as small points of light, striking audibly the top of a table, alighting on witnesses' bodies, moving in time to music, producing 'lightning flashes,' changing shape and moving at high speed in perfect geometric patterns. Perhaps more akin to the fiery luminous vehicle than the spirit orbs, which could be seen as more airy or etheric, these lights appear to be autonomous and dynamic, not to say daimonic.⁷⁰

To conclude, I will attempt to summarise the problem raised in this brief excursion into the perception of daimonic intelligences as visible lights, which is that of discriminating between epistemological modes. I would suggest that we could take a cue from neoplatonism and reinstate the understanding of the active or creative imagination as the appropriate faculty for perceiving and recognising dimensions of being beyond our sense perceptible reality, and this would require researchers to move beyond quantifiable paradigms to uncover an inner resonance with the 'supra-rational' nature of the material they are studying. Neoplatonism provides a rigorous theoretical framework for the relationship between our imaginal capacity and 'supernatural' events, but also promotes a participatory model of 'co-creation' in relation to such events which removes them from the arena of external objectivity and situates them in a dynamic mesocosm between the human and divine realms of time and eternity, of spatiality and imagination.⁷¹ In this place, a strange light may be both explicable in rational terms, and yet also point to a mysterious 'other'—a daimonic presence which may only be revealed as such through a radical shift in the researcher's cognitive register.

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¹ Clarke: 101.

² Shaw 2011: 18.

³ For a general survey of the many varieties of anomalous lights reported by witnesses, see Harpur: 1-21. Harpur also advocates a neoplatonic explanation, commenting that 'One way [...] of regarding luminous apparitions is as images of the soul projected by the soul itself' (16).

⁴ The epistemological issues which arise in relation to technological 'evidence' of spirit phenomena including ITC (instrumental transcommunication) deserve fuller attention. Celluloid, analogue and digital films and photographs may appear to pick up images which elude the naked eye, whilst recordings of 'spirit voices' are often indistinguishable from normal radio interference. Both forms have a liminal and ambiguous ontological status. See Cardoso, Cooper, Harvey, Solomon.

⁵ A good example being the insistence that all crop circles are made by people with planks and rope in the night (see Rowlandson, also Ferrer 2008).

⁶ On the ontological inversion, see Milne: 5. For a discussion on the exclusion of the sacred within academic discourse, see Kripal 2010: 253-255.

⁷ On participation as a research method, see Ferrer & Sherwood: Introduction; Kripal 2001: Introduction. Of course such an intuitive (or 'psychic') insight then requires interpretation and elucidation if it is to be communicated to others, a process which McGilchrist sees reflected in the correct functioning of the brain hemispheres (see McGilchrist 2010: e.g. 199, 208, 209). On Platonic epistemology see the 'divided line' metaphor in *Republic* Book 6 (509d-513e). In summary, the path of gnostic knowledge progresses through sense perception, opinion and fantasy ('human' and unreliable modes of knowing), to dialectic, reason and intellectual intuition as more stable and unified modes, before finally attaining union with the divine mind. Chittick (2007) notes 'Knowledge only qualifies as intellectual when knowers know it at the very root of their own intelligence and without any intermediary [...] [philosophy] was a path to discover the ultimate truths of the universe within the depths of one's own soul' (61). Later Platonists drew a distinction between arbitrary fantasy and a more noetic imaginal faculty which perceived divine truths via symbolic images presented to the senses, thus establishing two kinds of imagination—one illusory, the other archetypal or transcendent. On Plato and the relationship between *dianoia* and *phantasia* see Addey 2002; Cocking: 1-26; Tanner: 89-120; Watson: 1986, 1988: 1-14. On the neoplatonic development of the cognitive imagination, see Plotinus IV.3; Cocking: 49-68; Corbin 1997, 1999; Couliano: 3-27; Dillon 1986; Voss 2009. On the Renaissance debate between the two forms of imagination see Giglioni 2010.

⁸ Hesiod: 55-56, lines 986-992.

⁹ For a classical reference to the relationship of Phaeton with the planet Jupiter, see Cicero: 2.20.

¹⁰ Plato, *Timaeus* 41e; *Phaedrus* 246a.

¹¹ Critchlow: 15.

¹² See Critchlow: 25.

¹³ See for example Plato, *Epinomis*: 986c-d; Plato, *Timaeus*: 47a-d.

¹⁴ On metaphor and symbol as the language of sacred knowledge, see Barth; Chittick 2007, Corbin 1999; Needleman: chap.1; Versluis: Introduction.

¹⁵ See McGilchrist, e.g. 191, 195, 199, 208. It is interesting to note a resonance between the Platonic divisions of 'rational' and 'intellectual' knowledge and the functions of the left and right brain hemispheres as researched by McGilchrist.

¹⁶ Corbin 1999: 5.

¹⁷ See sources in fn.7, also Addey 2012; Cocking: ch.3; George; Mead: 56-81; Shaw 2010.

¹⁸ Synesius, *De insomniis* 7, 135, in Mead: 69.

¹⁹ Synesius 137a, in Mead: 71.

²⁰ See Corbin 1977. Synesius also suggests the identity of dream-images with the afterlife state of the soul at 137d (Mead: 72-73).

²¹ Synesius 137b, in Mead: 71-72.

²² Synesius 137b, in Mead: 72.

²³ Synesius 141c-142a, in Mead: 80-81.

²⁴ Plutarch: 471-3.

²⁵ Plutarch: 471.

²⁶ See Allen 1998: 131.

²⁷ Plato, 1517-1533: 908.

²⁸ Plotinus: III.5.6.

²⁹ Plotinus: III.5.6.

³⁰ Plotinus: III.5.6.

³¹ Plotinus: III.4.6.

³² In the lost *Life of Isidorus*, Mead: 60, n.2.

³³ See Addey 2010; Finamore; Shaw 2007, 2010; Uzdavynys: ch.5.

³⁴ On the nature and theurgic function of the daimon see Iamblichus *Dm*: II.1-10, IX; Clarke: 107-111; Dillon 2001; Shaw 1995: 131-142.

³⁵ See Iamblichus, *In Timaeum*, Majercik fr.49: '[The sphere] is both itself one and capable of containing multiplicity, which indeed makes it truly divine,' quoted in Shaw 1999: 134. Shaw describes the sphere as 'the hieroglyph—of the One itself.'

³⁶ See Ficino 1989: 351,353,355. Ficino refers to the Arabic astrologers and magi as being experts in the art of magical attraction through the powers of imagination. The idea of love as the supreme magician, attracting through affinity, is found in his *De amore* VI.10. See also Couliano: part II. Note also the etymology of the word 'desire,' from *de-sidere* (lat.), 'from the star or constellation,' implying that our deepest desire is connected to the stars.

³⁷ Iamblichus *In Timaeum* frag. 49, 13-15 trans. Shaw 2010: 11.

³⁸ Iamblichus *On the Mysteries [Dm]* V.4. trans. Shaw 2010: 10. See also Damascius 'it is certain that the circular figure is common to all the intellectual gods as intellectual' in Shaw 1999: 134.

³⁹ Iamblichus *Dm*: III.14. See also Finamore, 1985, Shaw 2010, Addey 2012, George.

⁴⁰ *Iamblichus Dm* III.14. See Shaw 2011: 13-15; Uzdavynys: 168-171 on the nature of divine or 'super-celestial' light and its perception via the soul's luminous vehicle.

⁴¹ Iamblichus *Dm* II.3; also, see Proclus *In Alcibiades* 71-77 on 6 levels of daimons and their functions (Dillon 2001: 8-9). See also Plaisance on the ambiguous status of Iamblichus' archons.

⁴² Iamblichus *Dm* II.4-5.

⁴³ Iamblichus *Dm* 11.4-5; see Clarke: ch. 6.

⁴⁴ Iamblichus *Dm* II.4.

⁴⁵ Proclus *In Remp* 1.39, 5-17, in Shaw 2010: 24.

⁴⁶ George: 80.

⁴⁷ Shaw 2010: 14, Iamblichus *Dm* II.6.

⁴⁸ Ficino, 'Argument for the *Apology*' in Allen 1998: 204.

⁴⁹ Allen 1998: 131-2; his translation of Ficino's *argumentum* is at 202-208.

⁵⁰ Ficino, 'Argument for the *Apology*' in Allen 1998: 202.

⁵¹ Ficino 1989.

⁵² Ficino 2000; see also Allen 1998: 135.

⁵³ Ficino 2000: 1708.

⁵⁴ Allen 1995: 79-81. In his sermon 'The Star of the Magi' Ficino suggests that the star is in fact a comet made of air condensed by the Angel Gabriel (Ficino 2006b).

⁵⁵ Ficino 2000: 1708.

⁵⁶ Ficino, Commentary on Plato's *Sophist* quoted in Allen 1989: 270.

⁵⁷ Ficino 2004: ch. XIII, 151.

⁵⁸ See Giglioni 2010 for the Renaissance development of the Platonic distinction between mimetic and icastic art. Proclus developed a sophisticated theory of symbolic perception as a theurgic process, contrasting mere resemblance with sympathetic resonance and ultimately identity of image and referent. See Struck: 227-253, Voss 2006b.

⁵⁹ See Newton 2004, 2006.

⁶⁰ Newton 1994: 31.

⁶¹ Newton 1994: 72.

⁶² Newton 1994: 72.

⁶³ Newton 1994: 75.

⁶⁴ Newton 1994: 98.

⁶⁵ On the question of the 'literality' of Newton's client's visions, see Voss 2010: 215 n.12.

⁶⁶ Rachel Keene at www.rachelkeene.net (accessed November 2012).

⁶⁷ Rachel Keene at www.rachelkeene.net (accessed November 2012).

⁶⁸ See Solomon.

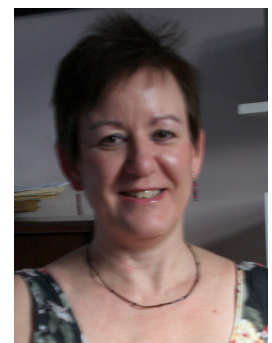
⁶⁹ www.thescolexperiment.com/book_01.htm (November 2012).

⁷⁰ It should be noted that flashing, darting orbs of light are also often witnessed at crop formations, reported both by believers in non-human agency and by human circle makers.

http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/circulos_cultivos/esp_circuloscultivos21.htm (accessed November 2012).

⁷¹ On the notion of 'co-creation' as a methodology see Ferrer & Sherman: Introduction.

Angela pioneered and taught an MA programme in Cosmology and Divination at the University of Kent, Canterbury. She is currently an associate lecturer at Kent, and teaches on the MA in Western Esotericism at the Exeter Centre for the Study of Esotericism (EXESES), at Canterbury Christ Church University, and at the Phoenix Rising Academy.



A Study of Several Reported Cases of Crisis Apparitions during the American Civil War

Simon Alexander Hardison

'It is well that war is so terrible, else we should grow too fond of it.'

-General Robert E. Lee to General James Longstreet

In the course of odd pursuits and baffling occurrences, July 2nd, 1863, marked an important and well documented incident. It was the second day of the Battle of Gettysburg and swarms of Confederate troops led an unsuccessful assault on the left flank of a Union army brigade at the Battle of Little Round Top. The brigade was under the command of General Strong Vincent, a lawyer turned officer of the Army. One of his regiments, the 20th Maine, led by Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, was widely acclaimed for the defense of the site. Mr. Chamberlain—who was later promoted to the rank of General and presented with the Medal of Honor—detailed what happened in his account *The Passing of the Armies* (Chamberlain 1915). In the account, he shares a rather peculiar story of what was reported by some of his soldiers at Little Round Top. The story was so odd that it prompted the Secretary of War under Lincoln, Edwin Stanton, to commission an investigation into it.

Union soldiers were under heavy fire in the midst of battle and were hardly able to hold off their Confederate brothers; it seemed as if retreating would be the only option for them. Fellow enlisted men and officers were falling from both sides in an orgy of blood and sabotage, as was typical through much of the war. Through all the disarray and confusion, a single pale rider reportedly emerged from the Union regiment. The figure moved throughout the Federal ranks, apparently gleaning gunshots from Confederate troops who saw it as well. The apparition was unaffected by any of the bullets, inspiring the Federal troops, who saw it spreading fear throughout the Rebel flanks—for many

claimed that it was none other than George Washington, the long deceased president and general.

Later, the Union troops, running low on ammunition, managed to salvage what they could from the dead. Colonel Chamberlain knew his regiment would not be able to survive another assault from the Confederate forces, which were at the time mobilizing together for a final attack. In a surprise move, Chamberlain ordered his men to mount bayonets and charge down the hill towards the Rebels. The united regiment of the 20th Maine stormed down with a fury of steel to meet the bewildered Confederates, who were certainly not ready for an attack of that nature. It was reported that the phantom figure, who was of an imposing and triumphant nature, appeared again in the front of the soldiers, leading the downward charge against the, by then, obviously disillusioned southerners.

What do we make of such accounts? Do we dismiss them outright, or do we allow ghost stories like this, however well documented, to positively impress upon our will to believe in them? Certainly incidents such as this intrigue us and inspire deep thought. Was the alleged sighting of Washington an elaborate hoax used to instill the losing Union regiment with an added sense of drive? Was it some sort of mass hallucination brought about through the confusion and hysteria of the battle? Or was it possibly an objective experience, vouched for by many credible witnesses? When one considers the fact that the story was taken seriously enough to prompt an investigation of the witnesses from within the government, the occurrence gains added weight.

Surely we have all heard of earthbound spirits, bound to haunt the locations of their final moments. There is the occasional whisper or mutter of stories involving long dead soldiers

who still march towards their enemies, rifles raised and banners flying high, seemingly trapped in some sort of limbo-like dream state. Parapsychologists theorize that these events could be memories which are implanted in an environment, replayed over and over again at the trigger of some event, much like when a DVD is played in a loop. A vast grouping of the reports of alleged wartime 'spirits of the dead' come from accounts of people holding vigils and ghost hunts at the sites of battles which are deemed to be haunted. Many people have experiences at these sites, such as seeing apparitions, which leave them convinced that they have witnessed a paranormal phenomenon. However, the incident mentioned above is different to these more modern accounts. It happened during a time of immense stress, death and crisis.

Crisis apparitions can be defined as vivid hallucinations of seemingly objective figures, witnessed in times of crisis. More often than not, they correspond to actual veridical events. A woman might awaken in the middle of the night to find that her husband is standing in her bedroom smiling at her, even though she knows he is fighting in a war thousands of miles away. His apparition eventually fades away, leaving the woman with some very unnerving sensations. She immediately records what happened and inevitably finds that her husband did, in fact, die unexpectedly at the same time she saw his apparition. Although the story of the woman is a fabrication, or at least a generalization, the phenomenon that it represents is not.

Edmund Gurney, the main author of *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney, Myers and Podmore 1886), proposed that such phenomena suggested that some form of telepathy was at work. Perhaps at their last moments people were sending out mental messages to loved ones, which the receivers of the messages saw as objective apparitions. Supporting this hypothesis was the fact that apparitions of people who were on the brink of death, or suffering great illnesses, were sometimes reported, even though in certain cases the person 'seen' did not actually die—they recovered. If the apparitions were objective spirits, then would they not only appear if they

were truly deceased? This was seen as possible evidence for the telepathy hypothesis.

Overall, there were 702 cases compiled for *Phantasms* (of the thousands that Gurney had received). Gurney often called crisis apparitions 'hallucinations of the sane.' This was because almost everyone interviewed had reported that they had the experiences at one time only, were not Spiritualists nor superstitious and were truly amazed by what they had witnessed. Why would regularly sane people (lacking any history of hallucinations or mental disorders) that were in good health, sporadically report vivid and concise experiences of 'spiritual visitations'? There seemed to be no obvious cause for the vivid experiences and the odd coincidences which often detailed them.

It was seen as very presumptuous to assume that the apparitions were actually the people who they appeared to be, but the veridical details which encompassed most reported cases suggested that some truly odd phenomena were occurring. As an example of this, the alleged visiting spirits rarely interacted, at least verbally, with the people who witnessed their appearance. It was rare that more than one of the physical senses were activated during the reported sightings, though this was not an unflinching rule. They also tended to fade away after several moments of observation. These very similar and widespread details pointed to the authenticity and actuality of a phenomenon—albeit an unknown phenomenon, which still eludes total explanation today.

Gurney and other members of the Society for Psychical Research, an institution founded in 1882 for the study of unexplained phenomena, knew that though *Phantasms'* 702 cases were suggestive of some sort of non-physical communication, they were somewhat meager, far from conclusive, and might possibly be dismissed by critics as mere coincidences. This was easily noted in many of the early and hostile reviews the book garnered, though Gurney and his colleagues—including no less than the renowned psychologist William James—felt that *Phantasms* was simply a beginning to the study of the subject. Gurney recommended that the

researchers collect at least 50,000 cases to obtain a more startling and undeniable effect. Even after his death on the 23rd of June, 1888, other SPR members continued the work that he had so adamantly pursued. The most extensive of these early SPR works into crisis apparitions came from the *Census of Hallucinations*, published in 1894.

According to the *Census*, 'Between the deaths and apparitions of the dying person and the living a connexion exists which is not due to chance alone. This we hold as a proved fact. The discussion of its full implications cannot be attempted in this paper; nor, perhaps, exhausted in this age.'¹ Of the six countries that participated in the study, the Census of England was the largest, drawing from a pool of 17,000 surveyed citizens. Each of the studies from every country duplicated and confirmed the findings of the others, with America having the second largest participation rate (7,123 persons surveyed). The British survey calculated the chance of any single person dying on a given day, or of a person having a coincidental hallucination during that time, as each being 1 in 19,000, based on the figures from the British Registrar-General.

Almost 2,300 people of the 17,000 surveyed had claimed to see an apparition at the time of a person's death. After much 'sculpting,' the SPR report had whittled this striking number down to 32 cases of the most striking evidential value. Even with this much lower number of seemingly solid cases, the odds against chance were calculated as being 442.6 to 1. The chance rate was .0723 out of the pool of 17,000 'victims,' but with 32 solid cases, something unexplained had been observed. The American survey, statistically calculated by the famed psychical investigator and debunker Richard Hodgson, obtained similar results, with 487 times the number that chance would predict (Blum 2006).

With the advent of the Society for Psychical Research and its splinter group the American Society for Psychical Research, the scientific investigation of things which seem inexplicable proceeded forward with a brightly lit candle, seeking to shed light on previously uncharted

terrain. It was clear that the apparitions remained, as they still do, one of the facets of human experience which we had yet to fully comprehend or explain. The least that can account for these occurrences seems to be telepathy, though some might too hastily jump to the spirit hypothesis without ample justification. This is not meant to imply that the spirit hypothesis does not adhere to the evidence; but as always, extraordinary claims will require a plethora of evidence to substantiate them.

One particular case of a crisis apparitional episode during the American Civil War, which could loosely be considered collective, is found in *Phantasms of the Living*. Though the witnesses to this occurrence were not at the same location, witnessing it together, they each reported that they had experienced something around the same time. According to the mother's portion of the account:

During the Civil War in America a young man of the name of George Roberts enlisted on the Union side. He was with those troops when Port Hudson, Louisiana, was attacked, and in an assault made upon that place on Sunday, June 14th, 1863, he was killed. He fell about 10 o'clock that morning. His parents, living in Chenango Co., State of New York, knew that he was in the neighborhood of Port Hudson, and that there might be a battle some time, but nothing more. On Sunday, June 14th, 1863, Mrs. Roberts was getting ready for church, and the first bell that rings a quarter before 10 had just ceased, when Mrs. R. heard George's voice calling to her, 'Mother! Mother!' It was perfectly distinct and clear, as though in the room. The fright and conviction of her son's death afflicted her so much that she became ill. Shortly after this, came the news of the death of George before Port Hudson, at the very hour that his mother heard his voice in her room calling her.²

The man who obtained the details of this particular occurrence was Reverend R. Whitting-

ham, of Pikesville, Maryland, a corresponding member of the SPR. In *Phantasms* he spoke highly of Mr. and Mrs. Roberts, saying that Mr. Roberts had confided in him that at 10 in the morning, as he rang the church bell for that time, he felt as if someone was standing behind him. Whittingham stated that, 'This being only a feeling, or impression, on his part, I did not think it worth mentioning, as it could be easily imagined afterward; but it fixed the time of George's death on my memory. That was the solitary instance of hallucination that they had ever experienced. They are by no means imaginative or credulous in temperament or habit.'

As Gurney speculates, during the episode the mother's mind may have naturally been preoccupied with thoughts involving her son, coincidentally at the same time in which she heard his voice. This may have caused a hallucination of that sort, though it does not account for the experience that the boy's father had. Indeed, we might assume that he misremembered the incident, even though he might not have been prone to doing such things. One might speculate that if the boy hadn't died, or if the man's wife hadn't discussed her own experience, he would've thought nothing of his own alleged experience. However, the fact of the matter remains that the boy did die and his death coincided with their alleged experiences.

Is it rational to suppose that a sane woman, not prone to hallucinations, however troubled by her son being at war, might randomly hallucinate that he was calling out her name –oddly at the same time in which he died? If this were a singular incident, or if the phenomenon happened on a smaller scale, we might find that to be the most logical persuasion. However, as we have established, this is not a unique incident and things of this nature happen at a peculiar frequency. Though the chance that this was a simple odd and coincidental hallucination is not totally extinguished, it seems to be unlikely. Hallucinations do occur, but they are not particularly frequent in people of good mental health, even if we were to speculate that every average person hallucinates at least once or twice in their lifetimes. So, why is it that the

concise and non-physical sensory stimuli of apparitions occur so often around the moment of death or serious illness?

Perhaps the woman and husband misremembered what actually occurred. The account mentioned was not sent to Gurney and his colleagues until 1884. Allegedly this case happened in 1863, so if the family did not document what happened properly, they could have simply misremembered the details of what happened. This is an assumption, but a well-founded one, because, psychologically speaking, we tend to sculpt things and twist them from what they originally were as time goes by. However, I would speculate that this particular argument might best be served against the father.

The mother, if she had heard her son calling out her name, would be unlikely to change such a simple, but emotionally compelling incident over time. This is because things that are emotionally significant are typically remembered better than things that are not.³ Obviously hearing her son call out to her would classify as an 'emotionally compelling incident.' The father's experience seems to have struck him less than the mother's, observable in the fact that he probably would have thought little of it had it not been for his wife's experience being made known to him.

One of the most suggestive goldmines of evidence in favor of the hypothesis of genuine spirit visitation is to be found in cases of collective apparitions. These are apparitions seen by more than one person at once, suggesting that they are objectively present. These cases, though rarer than the apparitions seen by individual persons, can be seen as an argument against the idea of telepathy in some cases –unless you were to interject a theory of multiple telepathic messages being sent at the same time (i.e. Gurney's proposal of telepathic 'infection'), which possibly seems more absurd than the acceptance of the spirit hypothesis. Collective reports of apparitions seen in times of crisis can often be uncovered by thoroughly studying parapsychological literature. What about the introductory story of Washington's apparition?

Though not strictly of the 'crisis' variety (as defined by Gurney), it has elements of those cases in it. It was certainly a collective case –and a very famous, though largely ignored one. However, when dealing with historical cases, it is very difficult to arrive at any definite conclusion about the witness's testimony, unless the querents used adequate investigative techniques. Gurney and the other SPR researchers cannot be accused of this, as some of the methods they used in the field are properly regarded as important pioneering work. Still, the inherent difficulty of dealing with interview based field research centers around the reliability of the witnesses in question –and, occasionally, interviewing methods may not be particularly effective research tools. The early SPR members, like Gurney, recognized these limitations, but in dealing with apparitional queries that predate 1882, we find further problems in the lack of adequate documentation –this assertion can even be made against the Washington case, as more specific details must be requested to discern fact from folklore.

Another account, though not exactly of the crisis or collective variety, stems from a communication given from Abraham Lincoln's wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, to her half-sister, Emilie Todd Helm (Martin and Birnes 2003). It is a repetitive experience and it must be pointed out that the first lady was an ardent Spiritualist, hosting many séances in the White House, some of which were attended by the late president. This is no secret and after their son William Wallace Lincoln passed away, Mary Todd told her half-sister that she was visited by his apparition every night at the foot of her bed, sometimes in the company of other spectral visitors. This was the first reported ghost sighting in the White House. This particular apparitional sighting is not obviously evidential, since it lacks any veridical details and might be explained away as a sort of psychosis induced in the first lady over grief for her lost son.

There exist many other examples of odd occurrences during the Civil War. There are numerous third-hand accounts of crisis apparitions during this time, a personal favorite being a

story based at the McRaven house in Vicksburg, Mississippi, where a Union soldier allegedly appeared before his colonel to report his own death (Coleman 1999)! There are also accounts of southern soldiers seeing ghastly black boars, which acted as omens for their impending death. Sadly, these accounts are notoriously difficult to trace to their origin and many probably have their roots in the imagination and folklore of America. It seems that many of these occurrences, especially the ones involving crisis apparitions, were not documented very well up until the founding of the SPR. The concept of conducting scholarly, scientific and detailed analyses of the unexplained phenomena of the world is a definite byproduct of the early efforts of that organization.

As this study is confined to the narrow reaches of a research paper, it cannot include all the reported accounts of crisis apparitions from the Civil War within it. What it can do is give a taste for some of the accounts which occurred prior to the work of the early SPR members, and cast light on the importance of documenting these occurrences. Apparitional encounters happened in the Civil War and prior to it, all throughout history. These incidents are interesting and monumentally important aspects of human experience that warrant study. It is a safe bet that many people will continue reporting experiences of this nature, as apparitions have been with us for thousands of years, even appearing in such archaic texts as Homer's *Odyssey*. What we make of such occurrences is currently a matter of speculation.

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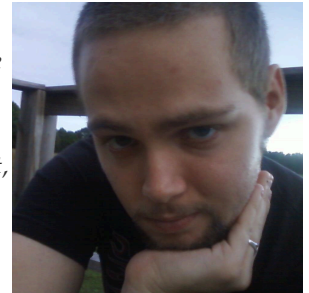
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¹ Written by Nora Sidgwick in 'The Report on the Census of Hallucinations,' Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research 10 (1894)

² Phantasms of the Living, (Gurney, 1886) p. 562, This particular case is number 614 of the 702 recorded accounts and the only incident which can be found in the book dealing with, or involving the American Civil War.

³ The basis for this theory comes from *Remembering Emotional Events: A Social Cognitive Neuroscience Approach* by Kevin N. Ochsner and Daniel L. Schacter. This publication speculates that emotionally charged events, whether positive or negative, are typically more clearly remembered than neutral ones.

Since I was young I've had a fascination with the 'paranormal.' In the last few years I've spent a large portion of my time delving into studying the psychical research of the past, in its historical and scientific context, and the modern field of parapsychology. I'm pursuing my PhD in psychology and I will be focusing on several things: the underlying factors behind our beliefs and disbeliefs, our deceptions and self deceptions - as well as the field of parapsychology itself, as, on a philosophical level, it continues to inspire a child-like sense of "wonder" in some deep, repressed part of my being.



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Herbal Lore in Central and Eastern European Shamanic Traditions

Henry Dosedla

Abstract

A number of vernacular plants with more or less narcotic properties still in use within traditional folk medicine were once also of importance in the context of shamanism, which, until recently, could be traced back in remote parts of Central and Eastern Europe, ranging from the alpine regions towards the Carpathian Basin. Among them, beside the use of *Amanita muscaria*, a prominent role was played by *Helleborus niger*, popularly known as Christ Rose, and several other varieties of that plant, which not only provided the base for various medical treatments as well as for narcotic drugs of considerable social and even commercial value, but also served as an archaic ritual plant accompanied by intricate mythological traditions of distinct shamanic relevance.

Key Words: Ethnobotany, Europe, Folklore, Herbal Lore, Medicine, Shamanism

Introduction

Owing to its specific toxic qualities *Helleborus niger*, as well as other related species, has played an important role within the medical traditions of the world for thousands of years. Accordingly it is generally supposed that this also applies to its status in the context of myth and ritual. Though detailed information is lacking from antiquity and later historic periods, useful insights may still be derived by means of anthropological fieldwork among some of the last archaic societies in and outside Europe. Adequate records of contemporary folk beliefs were shared by former hunters and poachers, as well as by traditional healers, having been collected during the last decades of 20th century. Deriving from many features of their oral traditions these apparently show not only significant parallels with most archaic patterns partly dating back to earliest prehistoric periods, but also with supernatural concepts, especially shared by several tribal hunting societies outside Europe until very recently still representing Neolithic standards, which have been studied through long term fieldwork by the author.

Varieties and Toxic Properties

Depending on respective vegetation patterns, various feral as well as domesticated species of



Fig. 1 *Helleborus niger*

Helleborus occur throughout the geographical zone between the eastern alpine regions, the Carpathians, and the Mediterranean parts of Southeastern Europe, but generally all species are of more or less convenient availability within the whole territory (Mathew & McLewin 1995).

The same applies to another toxic plant known as *Veratrum album*, which according to folk tradition is often referred to as some relative of Hellebore and accordingly named 'white' or 'false' Hellebore, in spite of belonging to the completely different botanical family of *Melanthiaceae* (Mathew & McLewin 2002).

Helleborus niger (Fig. 1)

The name 'black hellebore' does not refer to the white blossoms but to the blackish roots of the plant. As all members of the *hellebore* group *H. niger* contains various glycosides named helleborin(e), helleborein(e) or helleborigenin(e) and protoanemonin as well as varying amounts of saponines and ranunculoides or ranunculins depending on vegetation periods of different local conditions. Thus - while sharing the same physical effects - there are gradual differences in toxicity. Though intoxication risks in *H. niger* may be lethal compared to other hellebores this species is considered the least poisonous (Matthews 1989).

Helleborus viridis (Fig. 2)

'Green hellebore' derives its name from its striking green blossoms. Though its high degree of toxic glycosides as Helleborein and Hellebrin as well as Celliamin and Sprintillamin this widespread species was similarly used in folk medicine and other traditional contexts (Ahlburg 1993).

Helleborus foetidus (Fig. 3)

'Stinking hellebore' being quite as common as *H. niger* is marked by the somewhat unpleasant smell of its leaves, and is reputed for its comparatively low toxicity due to its lesser contents of glycosides (Perring & Walters 1989)

Helleborus odorus (Fig. 4)

This species also known as 'fragrant hellebore' is common in the Balkans and the whole Carpathian Basin, and derives its name from the pleasant bergamot-like smell of its blossoms (Petrovska 2012).

Helleborus orientalis (Fig. 5)

This species, reputed for its extreme toxicity, has a feral occurrence on the Balkan Peninsula, in the Carpathians and the Caucasus region (Mathew & McLewin 1998)



Fig. 2 *Helleborus viridis*



Fig. 3 *Helleborus foetidus*



Fig. 4 *Helleborus odorus*



Fig. 5 *Helleborus orientalis*



Fig. 6 *Helleborus purpureus*



Fig. 7 False Hellebores (*Veratrum album*)

Helleborus purpureus (Fig. 6)

Another variety with distinct reddish blossoms especially common in the Carpathian Basin was used in local folk medicine in the same way as *H. Odorus* (Mathew & McLewin 1998).

'False hellebores' (Fig. 7)

The name 'false hellebore' is used for several feral plants belonging to the species *Veratrum* of the *Liliaceae* family, which were often used instead of hellebore for the sake of very poisonous roots having a paralyzing effect on the nervous system. Their richness in alkaloids as protoveratrine and germerine significantly decreases with higher altitudes, which above 2500m is near to zero. While in Europe *Veratrum album* as well as *Veratrum nigrum* (white or black Veratrum) are common, there are also numerous related American species of which *Veratrum californicum* also known as 'corn lily' and *Veratrum viride* or 'Green Veratrum' are the most prominent (Van Wassenhoven 2004).

Historical Records

Due to the great diversity of *Helleborus* species, including so-called 'false hellebore,' most historical records referring to any of these plants do not indicate exactly which botanical species is being referred to. Still, numerous references to 'hellebore' - often called 'Melampodium' by Greek and Roman authors during antiquity - are dealt not only with practical medical properties of that plants, but also provide significant indications of related mythological and ritual contexts, which correlate with more recent folklore in distinctive ways.

The ancient Greek synonym for 'hellebore' is derived from the legendary soothsayer and healer Melampus of Pylos who, according to Herodotus and Pausanias, introduced the worship of Dionysos to Argos and was reputed of supernatural abilities, including understanding the language of animals. Owing to his use of 'hellebore' to cure the daughters of the king of Argos from severe insanity by breaking spells and enchantments the plant was named after him (Ntafoulis *et al.* 2008).

The distinct properties of 'hellebore' as an ancient device for so-called 'poison fishing' (Dosedla 1984), became famous as one of the first 'biological weapons' in antiquity during the Siege of Kirrha in 585 BC when huge amounts of the plant were used by the Greek besiegers to poison the city's water supplies in order to weaken the defenders by diarrhoea. Due to the necessity of considerable quantities of plant material a logical conclusion is the application of *Veratrum*, which in some places grows in enormous quantities.

The death of Alexander the Great has also been suggested as a possibly resulting from an overdose of medication containing 'hellebore,' which according to the reported intoxication symptoms was most likely rather *Veratrum* (Mayor 2003).

Within the Roman Empire hellebore varieties were already being domesticated and were propagated throughout all provinces. In many cases hellebore was planted near the door to protect against evil, or a vase of hellebore was brought into a room in order to purify any unpleasant atmosphere. In the course of Christianization the plant gradually became a topic of Christian legends and subsequent folklore thus received the name 'Christmas Rose,' and so was incorporated into medieval herbal medicine (Rice & Strangman 1993)

During the period of pan-European campaigns against witchcraft, lasting until the 18th century, the use of hellebore played a crucial role in court proceedings, especially involving the use of 'hellebore' as an abortive.

In the course of later decades when the abundant use of snuff became fashionable 'hellebore' became important once again as a component of various snuff mixtures of varying local production. It was at this time that professional collectors roamed throughout the alpine regions in search of hellebore, which, as a precious ingredient in snuff, gained considerable commercial value. Several literates and poets of this period, including Goethe and some of his contemporaries, but even monarchs such as Frederic the Great of Prussia, are said to have been addicted to snuff containing amounts of

'hellebore,' though in fact this was actually the so-called 'false hellebore.' In the course of industrial production of snuff the drug, due to legal restrictions, was never used as a component (Russell *et al.* 1981).

Contemporary Applications of *Helleborus*

While historical records in general do not provide accurate data concerning the use of various hellebore variants, including the so-called 'false hellebore,' anthropological research among recent societies sharing related traditions are of rather more revealing significance. Deriving from these investigations at least two different courses of traditional use of 'hellebore' are in evidence. Apart from intricate discussions on the possibility of continuity of traditions dating back to the most archaic periods versus the assumption of a so-called 'secondary revival' of ancient traditions in the course of a general Renaissance movement since the end of the middle ages, there are apparent differences between Western Europe and Eastern Europe with a significant intermediate region in Central Europe.

Owing to the fact that vast regions remained more or less untouched by any modernization movements originating from Western Europe, remote areas of largely illiterate societies in numerous regions of Eastern Europe persisted until the dawn of the 20th century without any basic written alphabet, and were thus entirely dependent on vernacular oral traditions. Since the geographical region between the Eastern Alps and the Carpathians shows an extremely multi-ethnic character, there is a general distinction between speakers of a multitude of languages, including German, Hungarian, Slovak, Slovenian, Croatian, Romanian, Ukrainian and Polish, as well as of some gipsy idioms and, to a certain extent, Yiddish (Gunda 1966). With regard to ethno-botanical research, the vast multilingual situation has led to extreme nomenclatural diversity, which naturally adds to the difficulty of verifying statements concerning hellebore varieties, which accordingly are referred to by nearly innumerable vernacular terms.

The state of remoteness in many of these regions prevailed throughout the Second World War and the subsequent period of communist rule until very recently. Thus fieldwork among such isolated communities resulted in a great amount of immensely revealing data on folk traditions of a most archaic character. This applies the most to phonographic recordings of the last traditional healers and professionals of the archaic trades of a pastoral economy; charcoal burning, fishing and hunting, from ambulant herbalists, blacksmiths and other craftsmen, as well as from poachers and smugglers, including a great amount of all sorts of traditional gypsy bread winnings (Hoppal 2007b).

Folk Medicine

While a nearly unbroken tradition of more or less professional herbalists in the Alpine regions can be documented going back to medieval times there are still debates on possible pre-Roman roots due to the fact that many names of vernacular plants, as well as of geographical localities, are of Celtic origin. The evidence for medical use of hellebore, as well as of false hellebore, is restricted to limited cases of oral use for fear of lethal intoxication, but smudging in order to cure skin diseases was a common practice.

An important field of employment occurred within so-called 'bath-cabins,' some of which are still preserved as a regional heritage. These were not only used like saunas, but were also used to dry flax and hemp for textile production, and various herbs were involved as aromatic bathing components, eventually also including hellebore. Condemned for witchcraft and as a popular meeting place for naked persons of both sexes this ancient Alpine bathing tradition ceased at the end of the middle ages due to strict abolishment by church authorities (Shahan 1904).

The same applies to the use of these plants as an abortive, as well as for contraception, which was supposed to have been the main reason for the cruel persecution of traditional healers accused for witchcraft, though in fact there were likely many other irrational reasons



Fig. 8 Cattle Decoration

(Ehrenreich & English 2010). Only the German term 'Bader,' in the sense of a 'bath keeper' who also served as a herbalist and traditional healer or barber surgeon, is reminiscent of that ancient practice (Himmelmann 2007).

Until recently *Helleborus niger* as well as other hellebore species were employed by village healers in order to cure animal diseases, especially in pigs, in the same way as described elsewhere by Roman authors such as Columella, which in fact was a widespread tradition throughout Europe. While there are scarce reports of farm animals having been offered bits of hellebore once a year around Christmas in order to prevent sickness for the same reason, bunches of hellebore were fastened to the stable doors for the sake of keeping out pests and chasing away evil spirits. Bunches of hellebore are used as part of the traditional head decorations of cattle on their annual solemn procession when leaving the alpine pastures to go back to their winter quarters (Figs. 8 & 9). Wearing a piece of hellebore root in the pocket was similarly regarded as protection for the bearer against all sorts of evil (Bartosiewicz & Greenfield 1999).

For similar reasons there is still a widespread alpine custom of censing all the farm

buildings with a mixture of distinct traditional herbs, including hellebore, which is usually performed at Epiphany (6th of January), referring to the three biblical Magi and their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh (Motz 1984).

As a common means of purification, bleaching and keeping away lice, hellebore – often also named ‘lice herb’ - was added to the laundry water. There were also traditional ointments containing hellebore reputed for promoting bright, healthy skin (Howard 1987).

Fortune Telling

Owing to the reputation of hellebore as an ancient omen plant it is involved in several folk beliefs and customs partly still in use in many places. One of these divination aspects is the blossoming cycle of *Helleborus niger* which usually starts around the end of the year, thus explaining the significant naming of the plant as ‘Christmas Rose’ or ‘Winter Rose,’ or an equivalent in most Slavic languages as ‘Moroznik’ with the meaning of ‘the frosty one.’ According to a later blossoming date a relatively long winter was likely to be expected.

Also a bunch of Winter Roses containing twelve blossoms kept in a bowl of water inside the room during the twelve days between Christmas and Epiphany is a common seasonal custom. Since every blossom was imagined to represent one month of the next year, open buds promised favourable weather and a good harvest whereas closed ones indicated the opposite. In many wine growing regions the plant was traditionally used in the same way, and was accordingly named the ‘Wine Rose.’ The naming of the plant by the Hungarian term ‘hunyor,’ in the sense of ‘number’ or ‘lot,’ is also refers to its identification as a seasonal ‘marker’ (Luczaj 2010).

There are yet other widespread divination customs also executed during the twelve ominous nights known as ‘ghostly’ or ‘wicked’ nights between December 24th and January 6th, but also during the ‘Night of Saint Thomas’ on December 21st, marking the date of solstice. One of the traditions surrounding these nights was a belief that on such occasions one could witness



Fig. 9 Cattle Decoration

the animals talking – farm cattle as well as forest game - which then would reveal secrets of the future. The secret means of understanding the animal language was the employment of hellebore which was best done through censing (Motz 1984).

Hunting and Poaching

A lot of ‘secret wisdom’ exclusively shared by illegal hunters and poachers, including fish poaching, dealt with more or less magical practises intended to enable extreme hunting success, as well as ways of hiding or escaping.

One means of gaining rodents or chamois at a time when the ground was heavily snow covered was providing feeding places with bundles of hay mixed with hellebore, thus weakening the game by causing extreme diarrhoea and numbness for an easy chance at killing them. The same result was achieved by feeding fish pieces of bread containing hellebore and other baits soaked in fluids mixed with parts of that plant, or stopping rivulets by some barrage and polluting the water with considerable amounts of hellebore (Gaal 1968).

Distinct recipes involving the use of hellebore dealt with the fabrication of ‘magical bullets’ that would never miss their target. Other such recipes were believed to obtain invulnerability against bullets. Wearing seeds of hellebore within the boots was regarded as a means of partly gaining invisibility, or at least a chance

of escaping without getting identified in case of persecution (Dioszegi 1998).

Related Ritual and Magical Realms

In spite of many features of hellebore lore indicating the relationship with distinct elements of shamanism, there is no clearly traceable evidence of this except in the case of the so-called 'táltos' - traditions still partly surviving within Hungarian folklore. The term 'táltos,' in the sense of a 'bearer of (magical) wisdom,' goes back to the most ancient periods of the Finno-Ugrian tribes known as 'Magyars.' According to legend the mythical leaders of their migration from the steppe regions near the Urals into the Carpathian Basin were a pair of brothers significantly bearing the names of Hunyor, the ancestor of the Huns, and of Magor, the ancestor of the Magyars (Hoppal 2007a).

According to historical evidence shamans were not only an institutional part of tribal life during pagan periods but also long after the foundation of the Christian kingdom of Hungary in 1000 AD. Thus the survival of 'táltos' traditions in several parts of present Hungary and in remote regions of neighbouring countries with considerable Hungarian minorities, where the tradition survived in many respects until very recently, having been studied and documented eagerly by anthropologists (Hoppal 2007b).

Apparently the use of hellebore is of striking significance within 'táltos' folklore not only regarding traditional village medicine but also as part of various magical practises. Due to a distinct feature of hellebore intoxication in sheep and goats resulting in offspring bearing just one eye at the front of the head, a fact which was reported by Greek and Roman authors. According to oral tradition the sacrificing of such abnormal creatures, regarded as a manifestation of supernatural powers, played a distinct role in secret 'táltos' rituals occasionally performed until recently in special cases (Van Kampen & Ellis 1972).

Besides most other uses of hellebore in Central and Eastern European folk traditions as mentioned in this text, an important ability of a

'táltos' is his or her handling of various kinds of divination practises including the involvement of so-called 'helping animal spirits' as well as of an abundance of 'love charms,' all of them indicating significant features of shamanism as known from Central Asia. More detailed accounts of this topic will be presented in another paper to be published in a forthcoming issue of this journal (Dosedla 2013).

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- Henry Dosedla conducted fieldwork as an archaeologist and social anthropologist during the early seventies among the last societies representing Neolithic standards in Melanesia, dealing with their environment management, mythological folk biology, medical traditions and religious concepts including divination systems. Dosedla was also engaged in several development programs and documented gradual stages of cultural change and related social effects. After retirement from the Prehistory Department of the German Museum of Agriculture at Hohenheim University/ Stuttgart his further research and publications have focussed on parallels between recent archaic societies and conditions in prehistoric Europe.



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Out of the Body and Into the Lab: Defining Dr. Alex Tanous' Abilities

Callum E. Cooper

During a recent monthly meeting of the Centre for the Study of Anomalous Psychological Processes (CSAPP), University of Northampton, a presentation was given by the author of the *The Life and Work of Dr. Alex Tanous*. At the end of the presentation, after showing film-footage of out-of-body research (OB, or out-of-body experiences, OBE) carried out by Dr. Karlis Osis on Dr. Alex Tanous, one student raised an interesting point about the definitions used regarding OBEs and astral projections. Dr. Tanous was labelled as having the ability to consciously release his mind from the body and have OBEs in which he obtained information from sources that he would not be able to obtain by known sensory means. During the footage of the experiments held at the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) conducted between the late 1970s and early 1980s, the relaxed body of Dr. Tanous would speak to relate the targets he was seeing – while being out of the body. However, the student at the CSAPP meeting remarked: ‘In an altered state of consciousness, the body becomes more or less functionless in order to allow the mind to travel beyond the body, yet Dr. Tanous spoke to relay the targets seen during the experiment - how?’ (or words to that effect).

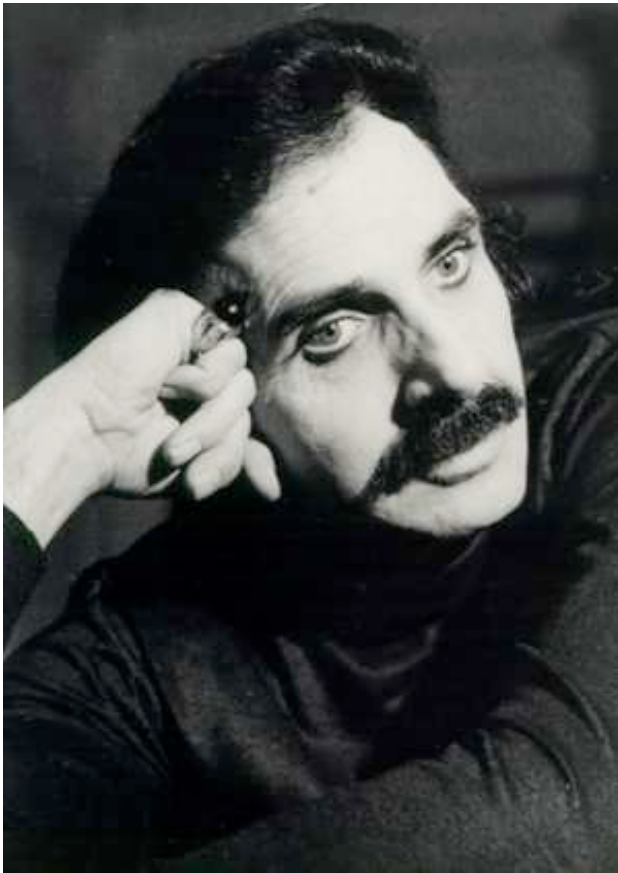
First, let us discuss the experiences of Dr. Tanous to assess whether he was an OBEer or an astral projector (if they are two different things), which should in itself answer our second question as to whether or not something does actually leave the body to create the classifications of experience/ability that we currently use today.

Generally, in OBEs, people report that they have a sense of hovering above their own body and then traveling to whatever location they desire, before they eventually return and contemplate their experience. With astral projection, there is the suggestion that something more is leaving the body, such as an essence of the mind

which is not necessarily invisible, but can be seen as a mist, a shadow, a shape or a full apparitional form, and which is assumed to be some physical aspect of consciousness (occasionally referred to as the soul). An excellent example of this can be found in the reported astral projection abilities of the psychic medium Attila von Szalay, which were witnessed by Raymond Bayless (see McAdams & Bayless 1981:10-12). When von Szalay underwent astral projection, he reported that his visions were as if he were looking through a goldfish bowl or an aquarium; he could travel at will and report on the environments he had explored. Once, when he travelled to the home of Raymond Bayless, and it was reported by Bayless that he had seen a shadowy shape hovering about one foot off the floor, which was stationary for a few seconds, and then moved about the rooms at incredible speed before vanishing. On the next occasion that von Szalay and Bayless met each other, von Szalay told Bayless - to his surprise - that he had visited his home in his astral body.

Therefore, an astral projection suggests that a physical form can be observed by a witness while it is in the process of traveling and exploring, whereas someone who is experiencing an OBE (or remote viewing) can not only psychically see information at a distance, but can also extend their consciousness to that distant location to obtain information. However, even OBEs and remote viewing may be separate classifications of the mind leaving the body, therefore we may need to understand the OBE in terms of stages of altered states of consciousness. This can be explained better if we examine more closely the abilities of Dr. Alex Tanous in particular, which have been researched and reported, and whose experiences have been discussed.

Dr. Tanous used the following definitions for astral projection and OBEs: ‘astral travel [is] the



casting out and later retrieval of one's "astral body," a kind of energy or spirit entity, and out-of-body experiences or OBE, in which some relatively intangible part of a person leaves his body and returns' (Tanous, with Ardman 1976:114). It was believed by Dr. Tanous that he had experienced both astral projection - during which people had witnessed apparitions of him (see Auerbach 1986:43) - and OBEs. However, he was never sure exactly how he managed to do this. One explanation is that he needed to be in a relaxed state and perhaps lost in thought, like a daydream. He had been experiencing these sensations ever since his childhood. He therefore accepted them as being completely natural. Dr. Tanous specifically described his OBEs as follows: 'When I was about seven years old I began to find myself in places which I didn't recognise. The form of the experience has not changed. I seem to myself to have become a very small point of light, my body seems to be no longer there, but the whole universe seems to have opened up to me' (Tanous 1975:231-232).

This process of the OBE is how Dr. Tanous described his personal experiences with the phenomenon during experiments he participated in at the ASPR. These experiments were filmed for publicity of the research at one point, but were also subsequently published (Osis & McCormick 1980). These experiments not only set out to investigate OBEs, but also to see whether any physical essence does indeed leave the body that is in some way measurable. Dr. Tanous further stated that during these experiments: 'The observers say that I can speak through the whole experiment, and describe what is going on, and what targets I see inside Dr Osis' apparatus. I myself declare when (subjectively at least) I have left the body and the little ball of light which I seem to be is at its brightest. At that moment I name the target which I see.' (Tanous 1975:232).

These experiments suggested from the point of view of the researchers and from Dr. Tanous' experiential point of view, that an altered state of consciousness had been achieved, whereby the subject was no longer aware of their physical body and therefore concentrated on their second body, the body that travels (in Dr. Tanous' case he called this second body 'Alex 2'). Therefore, an altered state of consciousness appears to be essential in successful OBEs. This has been found to be the case in many laboratory experiments where the most hit rates appeared to be achieved when altered states of consciousness are recognised and reported by either the participant or experimenter (Osis 1974).

Although neither Dr Osis nor his assistant, Donna McCormick, ever saw an 'astral body' of Dr. Tanous next to the apparatus which held the targets, some physical changes were nevertheless noted. For example, for Dr. Tanous, or anyone else to know what the targets were, it required the observer to stand next to the apparatus in the laboratory and place their eye in line with a view hole, where the targets could be seen inside the apparatus. When Dr. Tanous felt that he was most externalised and to be actually 'out of his body,' this actually corresponded with higher hit rates. It also corresponded with strain-gauge activation levels which were at

their highest during high scoring periods when 'Alex 2' claimed to experience physically peering through the view-hole on the apparatus at the target. This suggested 'something' physical was present and being measured, but what this was exactly was only put down to speculation and was presumed to be some form of extension of consciousness or the astral body (Osis & McCormick 1980). However, Rogo (1986) pointed out that with this particular experiment on Dr. Tanous' abilities we have to be careful in assuming that some form of consciousness or astral body was being measured during the experiment, as it is equally - or more likely - that the higher strain-gauge levels could have been caused by a psychokinetic effect produced by Dr. Tanous (or possibly even unconsciously by the experimenters themselves).

If we strictly assume astral projection to be the production of a physical form or apparitional figure when the subject feels themselves to be travelling while in an altered state of consciousness, and experiences a passage of time, then we could keep the definitions of OBE and astral projection as two different phenomena, with one leading into the other and only being marginally different. In that case, Dr. Tanous' own definitions of OBE and astral projection are most suitable. The experiences are different in the sense that one involves more of a physical presence experienced by observers during the event, and a deeper sense of an altered state of consciousness in the experient who extends their mind. However, even though Dr. Tanous claimed at times he had had both experiences, and that he wasn't aware he was speaking or communicating during the ASPR experiments, his experiences do seem to be closer to the definitions given to OBEs. Though we could argue that perhaps Dr. Tanous' experiences were bordering on both. If we consider psi experiences and altered states of consciousness in stages (from descriptions of reported experiences), they would likely follow the steps below:

CLAIRVOYANCE

v

REMOTE VIEWING

v

OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE

v

ASTRAL TRAVELLING

It is common knowledge in parapsychology that OBEs and astral projection are often casually classified as the same thing, something which Dr. Tanous himself noted (Tanous, with Ardman 1976). He also stated that in some cases of military projects involving psi research, remote viewing experiments were given a large amount of funding, and changed the name of OBEs to 'remote viewing.' This was done simply because it "sounded better" and appeared by many to be the same thing and ultimately a casual label (Tanous 1988). Yet, from the stages above it seems we have such definitions for a reason, to classify the experienced phenomena. This has not simply added a label to something which we cannot explain, there is a suggestion that psi may become more prominent and more objective the more our conscious awareness alters. This is supported by meditation studies (e.g. Tribbe 1979), Ganzfeld research (e.g. Roe, Cooper & Martin 2010), and work on psychedelics (e.g. Luke 2010).

Certainly in the experiments conducted at the ASPR, it appears Dr. Tanous was being tested for - and producing - an out-of-body ability, as is stated in the study title. By the definitions presented, it seems that throughout his life he had had both OBEs and astral projections, where in the latter phenomenon, people had reported Dr. Tanous' apparition and at times interacted with it. It is equally a fair argument that these labels and definitions are just not needed, and that ultimately all we need to know is that they suggest a psi ability in which the mind extends into the environment to psychically retrieve information. However, purely to answer the question of whether there is a difference between these phenomena, it seems there are marginal differences, so marginal in fact that we can argue that one experience leads into the other which could be down to varying levels of indi-

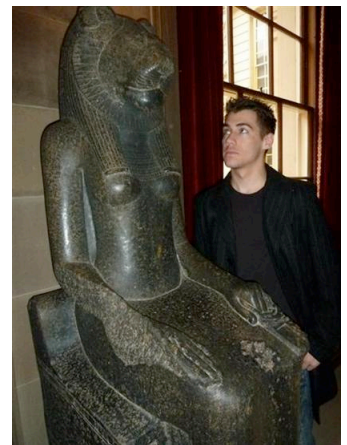
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vidual conscious awareness. There is some suggestion that something leaves the body during an OBE that could be measured, and there is certainly eyewitness evidence to suggest that apparitional forms have been seen of people who at the time of the sighting were actually miles away having some form of astral projection (perhaps while mediating at the time or sleeping). Therefore, from exploring the experiments and experiences of Dr. Alex Tanous, there appears to be a difference between OBEs and astral projection, but this difference might be considered by some to be trivial, which will likely continue to be subjected to a circular debate amongst researchers.

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Cal Cooper is a PhD researcher in psychology and a lecturer in 'parapsychology & anomalous experiences' at the University of Northampton. He is the author of *Telephone Calls from the Dead* (2012)



TELEPHONE CALLS FROM THE DEAD



CALLUM E. COOPER

Many people, when asked, will say that at some point in their lives that they have experienced what they believe to be a ghost, or have had a psychic experience. However, will many people openly admit that they have experienced what they believe to be a 'phone call from the dead'? This question has been asked before, and was investigated back in 1979, in a book entitled *Phone Calls from the Dead*, written by D. Scott Rogo and Raymond Bayless. For many years, this subject has remained dormant, until now, thirty years on, in this new book where the research has been revived and continued. For more information visit www.calcooper.com

Recognition for Paranthropology and ARC

Fiona Bowie

In a recent conference paper George P. Hansen, a professional parapsychologist who has worked at the Rhine Research Centre and Princeton's Psychophysical Research Laboratories, cited the work of the Afterlife Research Centre (ARC) and *Paranthropology*, together with the writing of Professor Jeffrey J. Kripal in Religious Studies, and Wouter Hanegraaff's work on Western Esotericism, as evidence that new developments in psychical research are coming not from 'establishment parapsychology' but from the periphery. In disciplinary terms psychology has, he claimed, handed the baton to anthropology and religious studies. We are delighted with this recognition of ARC and *Paranthropology*, but see our efforts as part of a growing swell of serious academic interest in studying the afterlife and paranormal. In the UK, for instance, Hannah Gilbert and colleagues in the Department of Sociology at York University have organized four very successful conferences under the title Exploring the Extraordinary. The group was started in 2007 (predating ARC by a year or so). The long established Society for Psychical Research in London, founded in 1882, is more active than its American counterpart (ASPR) appears to be according to Hansen, with a quarterly journal, newsletters, conferences, lectures and research committees. It also has a user-friendly web site, which has as its strap line the famous quotation from Carl Gustav Jung, 'I shall not commit the fashionable stupidity of regarding everything I cannot explain as a fraud.'

Research activity is often dependent on small funds and relatively few individuals, but UK universities have shown that they are willing to host conferences on paranormal themes – largely, as Hansen notes, linked to religious studies or anthropology/sociology departments. The universities of Kent, Sussex, Cambridge, York, Bristol, Trinity St David, King Alfred's

Winchester and Goldsmith's College London have, for instance, all run seminars, workshops or conferences on paranormal themes in the last three or four years. The Read-Tuckwell Fund for the Study of Immortality, administered by the University of Bristol, and the Sutasoma Fund, administered by the Royal Anthropological Institute, have sponsored Emily Pierini's work on mediumship in Brazil, while the Perrott-Warrick Fund, administered by the SPR and Trinity College Cambridge have sponsored biologist Rupert Sheldrake, as well as Gregory Shushan's comparative work on conceptions of the afterlife, based at the Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion at the University of Oxford.

This list is certainly not exhaustive. One could also, for instance, mention the activities of the Scientific and Medical Network in the UK, which has put on a series of successful conferences touching on paranormal themes, such as the third 'Body and Beyond' conference on notions of the subtle body in September 2012. In the USA also there is more activity on the margins than the just the work of the Esalen Centre and Jeffrey Kripal, or the recent interest in Western Esotericism. Hansen's own former employer, the Rhine Research Centre in Duke, North Carolina and Atlantic University at Virginia Beach, Virginia, based on the vision of the famous healer and medium Edgar Cayce, for instance, are among institutions currently active in paranormal research. Networking between people within these organizations is growing, with exchanges of invitations to speak at conferences or to give invited lectures.

What has changed in the last decade, and made these admittedly often marginal or peripheral organizations and individuals visible, is the use of Internet technology and the World Wide Web. In the case of ARC and *Paranthropology*, for instance, it is free or relatively inexpensive software for social networking, blogging and publishing that has enabled us to start new

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ventures on the basis of personal and shared interests, without the need for large scale funding or formal institutional support. The field of afterlife studies and paranormal research probably includes more 'independent scholars' and postgraduate students than established university post-holders, and the dominant academic culture is more often than not hostile to such research, but the networks between researchers and active institutions are growing nonetheless. Time will tell whether the globalization of knowledge will help achieve something akin to acceptance for afterlife research for the next generation of scholars. What is clear is that they (we) have many distinguished predecessors and solid academic foundations on which to build.

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Fiona Bowie is an Honorary Research Fellow in Anthropology at the University of Bristol and member of Wolfson College, Oxford. Research interests include ethnographic approaches to the study of religious experience and African religions.

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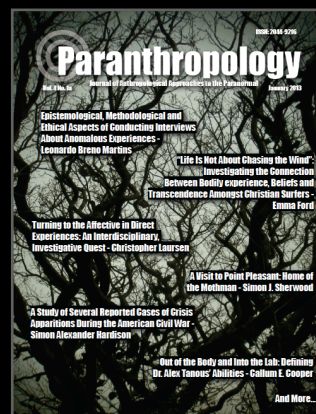
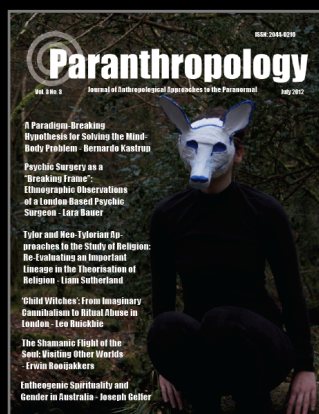
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